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COMICS INTERVIEW

#19

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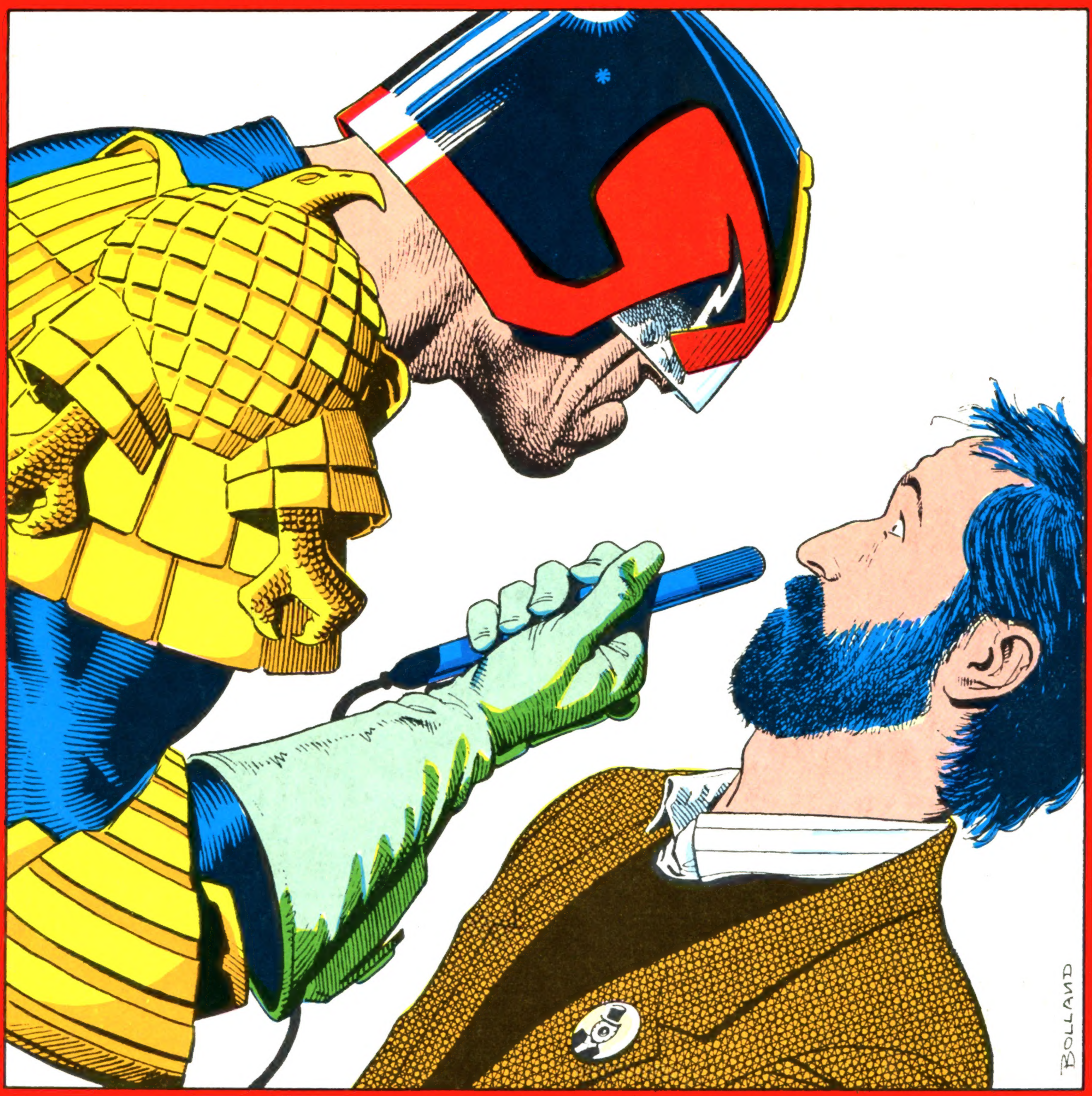

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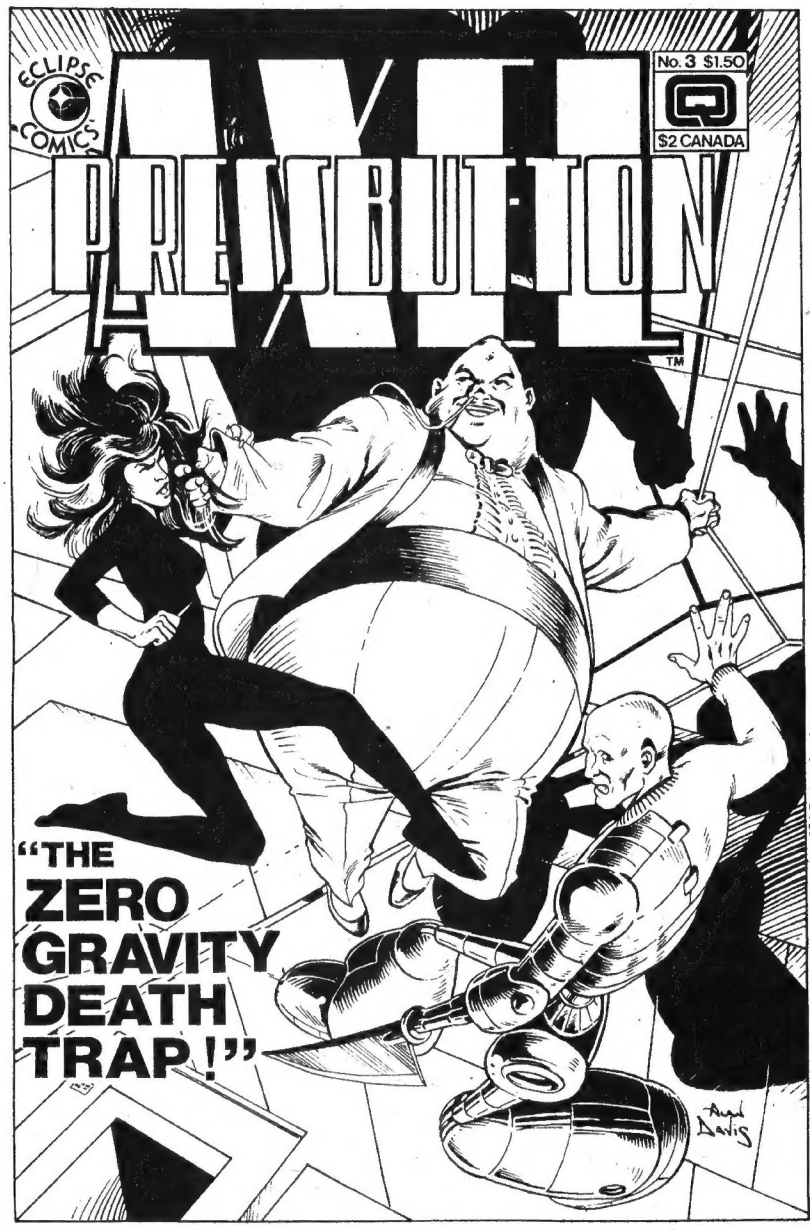

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--Don Thompson
THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE
October 26, 1984

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UP FRONT

"The Art of Conversation"

One of life's rare pleasures is good conversation--and what a pleasure it can be! Especially when it's on subjects near and dear to our hearts, subjects of specialized personal interest such as, in our case -- comics.

Discussions about the skills of good writing and drawing, what constitutes good comics, the many and varied influences at play upon different folks in different places working in the same field at the same time...these are not topics likely to come up often in the course of common conversation. That is, unless you count yourself among the fortunate few who spend their lives doing comics for a living. And even then, the disciplines involved in doing creative work call for a high degree of solitude, so the opportunities to engage in a meaningful exchange of ideas with fellow creators can be few and far between for some.

A couple years ago, in the first issue of this magazine, I mentioned how much I enjoy good talk. This issue of COMICS INTERVIEW is especially rich in good conversation. Whether or not you care for the comics work of the folks interviewed here, I think you'll find a wealth of insight and intelligence in what they have to say -- and some mighty fine conversation.

-Dave

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Crimson Dreams 3

Brought to you by:
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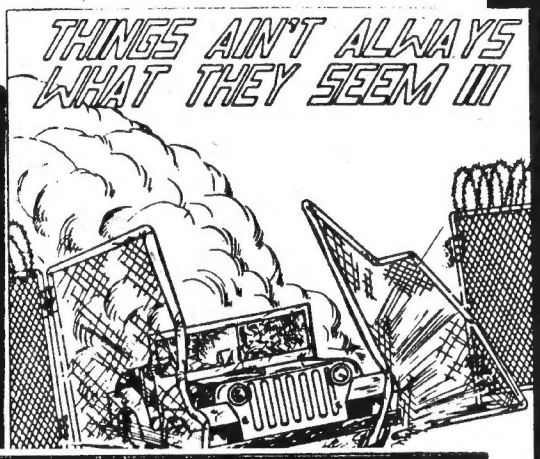

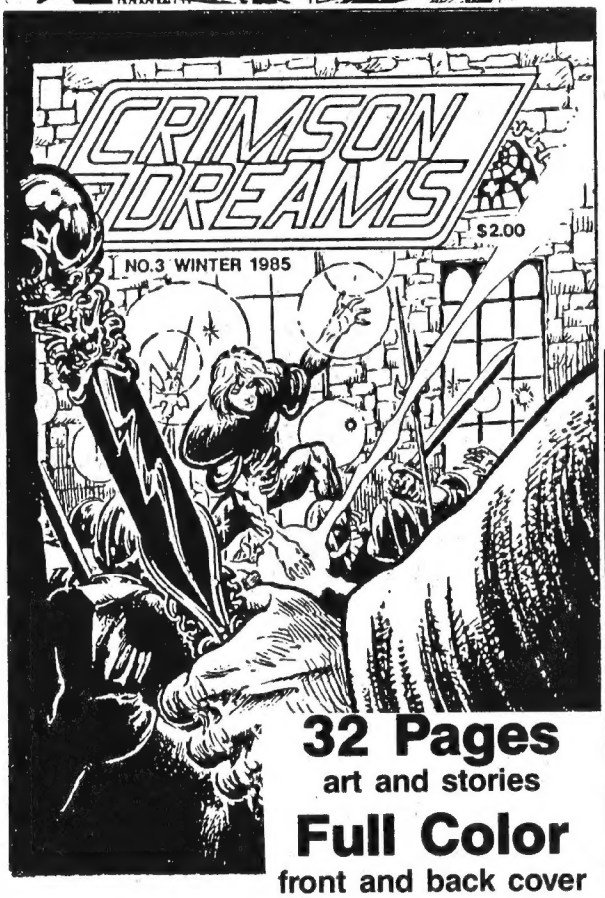

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"The NEIL world flops back and forth between funny animals and funny people."

Photo: Mark Shainblum

ARN SABA

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Arn Saba

Residence: Toronto, Canada (under protest)

Born: 1947, Vancouver, Canada

Occupation: Writer/Cartoonist (this year). Next year: who knows?

Favorite Activities: Thinking up new story ideas; enjoying the outdoors; travel; playing with radios, tape recorders, and cameras (not necessarily all at once); browsing in bookstores; Theatre!

Least Favorite Activities: Having to do the work behind those new story ideas; washing dishes; going to parties; doing anything I've already done before!

Cartoon Influences: Walt Disney!; Carl Barks, Milton Caniff, Hal Foster; and the great Sunday comics of earlier in this century, in general.

Currently Admire: LOVE AND ROCKETS; the new stuff by Eisner; the work of Harvey Pekar; and anything by Trina Robbins.

Other Influences: Fred Astair; the history of American popular song, from 1850 to present; Musical Comedy.

Favorite Place: California! — especially Santa Barbara and San Francisco.

Most Hated Places: New York, Mexico City, Naples — anywhere with too many people!

Uncontrollable Weaknesses: Electronic gadgets (especially when miniaturized); sugar; anything to do with Disney; expensive art books.

Who Would You Like To Be? Fred Astair or Donald Duck.

Favorite Music: New dance music; R & B; New Wave; Swing; Musical Theater.

Secret Ambition: To be a career diplomat.

Most Concerned With: Understaning the dark side of human nature; wondering how we can learn to overcome it. I would also like to lose 15 pounds.

Most Thankful For: Health; being born in North America; family; my many wonderful friends; and above all, my girlfriend, Pam.

Worst Habit: Nagging Pam.

"I think that super-heroes are really

A horse, you say? An anthropomorphic doll? A talking cat?

No, no, that's all wrong. You'd never get a comic book published today with characters like that (unless the talking cat slinks around lots of pretty women in sexy lingerie). It's impossible! Where are the skin-tight costumes, the flashing powerbeams, the demonic, cackling supervillains? A comic like that is doomed before it starts.

In fact, Arn Saba's NEIL THE HORSE (featuring a horse — Neil — a talking cat — Soapy — and an anthropomorphic doll — Mam'selle Poupee) is a respected member of Aardvark-Vanaheim's megalithic publishing empire (which also includes CEREBUS, normalman, MS. TREE and others). Arn himself is witty, articulate, intelligent, and opinionated as all hell about this comics industry we all love. Possessing the rare ability to be softspoken and outspoken at the same time, Arn opened up about his characters, his background, his philosophy of comics and his sense of the history of the medium when he was cornered by Mark Shainblum, Gabriel Morrissette and Pierre Fournier at MapleCon 6, Ottawa's giant sf/comics/media convention held on the campus of Carleton University...

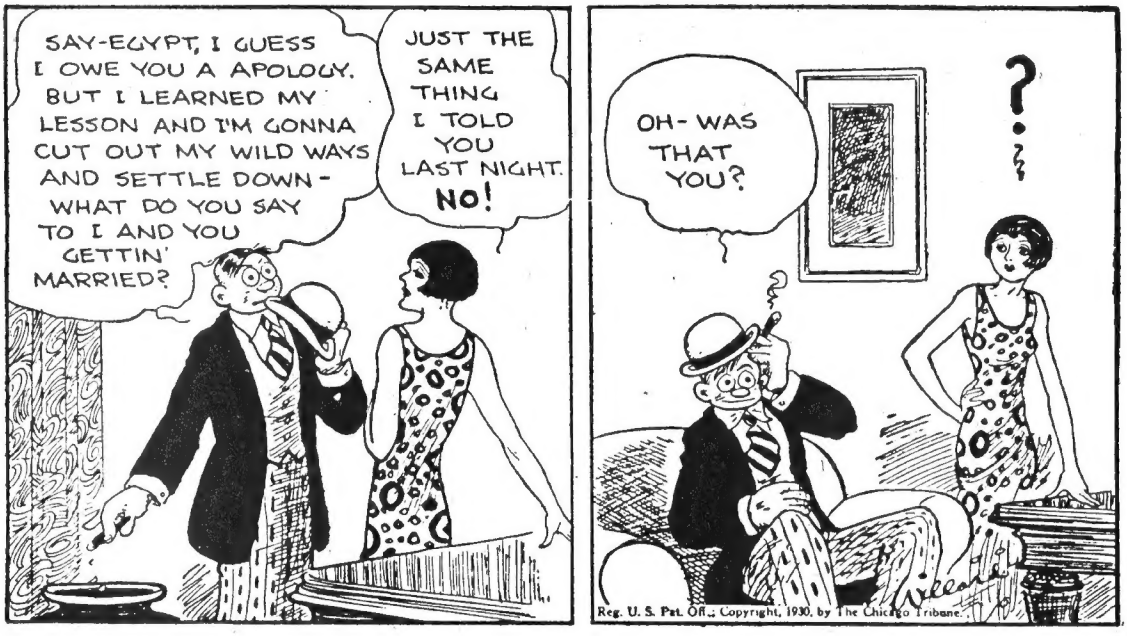
MARK SHAINBLUM: *Let's start off controversially — why a horse and not radioactive mutant ninjas?* (Laughter.)

DON'T TLY STLANGE MELICAN WORDS!—YOU NO CAN SLIDE OUT FROM THIS!
WHO'S TRYIN' TO SLIDE OUT!—DO YOU THINK I HAD MY PRIVATE OGRES GOBBLE UP THAT ADVANCE GUARD?
DON'T KNOW WHAT— BUT IS TLAP! —YOU MARCH AHEAD! IF IS AMBUSH YOU FIRST ONE SHOT!
MILTON CANIFF

Milton Caniff's TERRY & THE PIRATES, circa '36-'37.

ARN SABA: O gee! That really connects to something we said before the tape recorder got turned on, so I want to go back to the statement that I love making, which is that I don't think that I've ever read a single super-hero comic all the way through.
MARK: *That's remarkable, for someone in the field.*
ARN: I don't think it is. I don't think that it's remarkable at all. It may be remarkable for today, but I was born in 1947, so I grew up in the 1950s, reading Dell Comics — UNCLE SCROOGE and all the **Barks** stuff. **Barks** is my great hero, obviously. And reading all the funny-animal stuff from the 1950s — THE FOX AND THE CROW, and all the DC stuff, and also reading **Milton Caniff**. My mother had a collection, which she cut out when she was a kid, of **Milton Caniff**'s TERRY AND THE PIRATES strip, from the 1930s, and I became very interested in newspaper strips. But I never really got into super-heroes at all. I found them really boring when I was a kid, and to this day I have nothing but contempt for them. *(Laughter.)* I'm not impressed. It's a gigantic mistake for people to think that they are the bulk of the field. If you look at the history of comics — the comic-strip medium, actually — it started in 1895 with newspaper strips —
MARK: *THE YELLOW KID.*
ARN: THE KATZENJAMMER KIDS. I love all those old strips. I have a big col-

"The Girl He Left Behind" from MOON MULLINS by Frank Willard, 1930.


SAY-EGYPT, I GUESS I OWE YOU A APOLOGY. BUT I LEARNED MY LESSON AND I'M GONNA CUT OUT MY WILD WAYS AND SETTLE DOWN - WHAT DO YOU SAY TO I AND YOU GETTIN' MARRIED?
JUST THE SAME THING I TOLD YOU LAST NIGHT. NO!
OH- WAS THAT YOU?
?
Reg. U. S. Pat. Off., Copyright, 1930, by The Chicago Tribune.

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killing the comics as an art form."

© 1985 Arn Saba

lection of strips, pre-World War II — the big beautiful Sunday funny-pages. I've got thousands of those things. But, to me, that is the history of comics, and in some ways, the height of comics. The best comics have ever been. They were more adult, more intelligent, better printed, better color, better distributed and more popular at that time than they ever have been since. So I think that super-heroes in comics are a cancerous tumor coming into the field *(laughter)* — I not joking! They're really killing the comics as an art form, and the sooner super-heroes can be cut out and destroyed, the better.

MARK: *Nothing like understatement.* (Laughter.) *What are your favourite comics books? Your influences?*

ARN: My influences were in the past — the ones I just mentioned: **Carl Barks** and **Milton Caniff**. They're the two absolute tops. And then anything to do with the **Disney** studios. We're not talking about comics but animation. I really admire **Disney** as a man and also his work. Then, in later years, things I've come to admire a lot are PRINCE VALIANT, FELIX THE CAT —

MARK: *Yes, I noticed a trace of Felix.*

ARN: Oh, in the strip. Very definitely. **Floyd Gottfredson**'s work in the 1930s — this is all stuff I saw when I was an adult — all the old strips from before the Second World War. BRINGING UP FATHER, MOON MULLINS, POLLY AND HER PALS. Those are probably my favorites. When I was a kid, I was totally absorbed by the **Disney** studios.

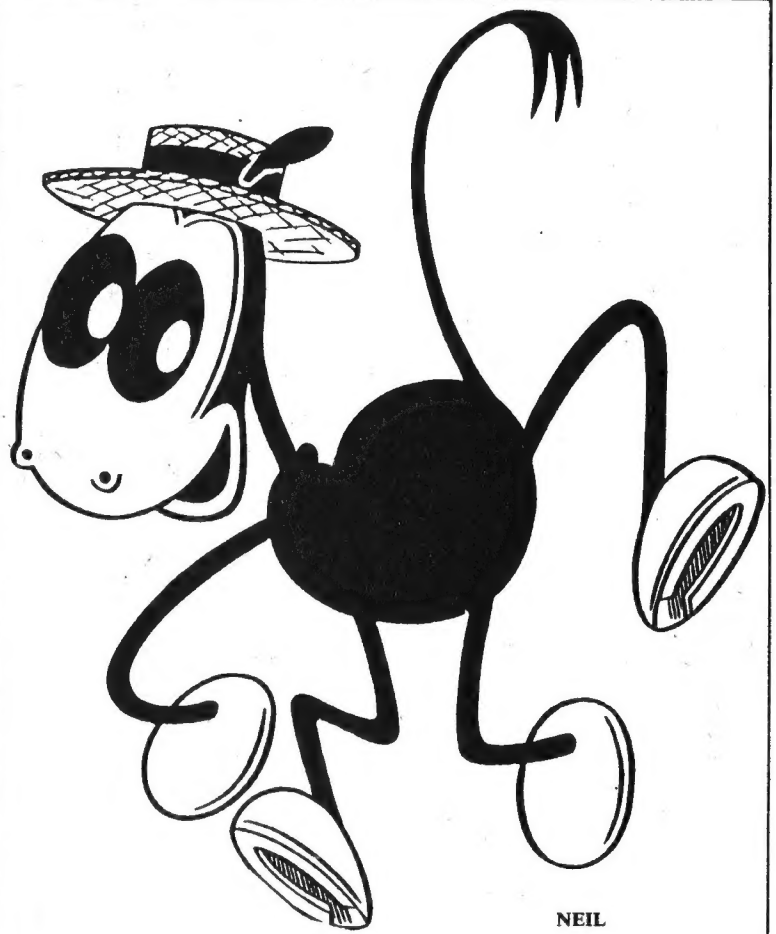
MARK: *I really loved those Disney books, too.*

ARN: And also the animation. I read a *lot* of comics when I was a kid. And also children's books. RUPERT THE BEAR was a big influence on me. It was an English children's series, sort of semi-comics. And all the great children's series that were around — FREDDY THE PIG, I loved FREDDY THE PIG — also DOCTOR DOLITTLE and the OZ books. Children's books were a big influence on me. And another big influence was musical comedy.

MARK: *Oh, yeah.*

ARN: I have as much interest in musicals as I do in comics, actually. For a long time I was torn between working in the theatre and working in comics. And I am still torn. I still have potential — contacts and friends and so forth — to write some shows and get them on the stage, at least in Toronto if not elsewhere. But I don't have time. I'm really concentrating on comics now.

MARK: *Well, that leads to a question I've been meaning to ask you. I notice you have integrated musical comedy into NEIL THE HORSE to a great extent. How do you think that works in a silent medium such as comics?*



NEIL

ARN: The challenge, of course, is to make the reader feel that it is not silent. That actual music and dancing are happening. And I don't know if I've succeeded as much as I'd like to. I certainly have tried. I couldn't resist doing it. The only way I could get myself interested in comics was if I could bring in all my other interests, because otherwise I knew I'd be frustrated. Because I knew I wanted to do musicals — I *have* done musicals — and I would have always been yearning after that, if I were not — I decided, "Well, I may as well just put everything in here that I like." And it's never really scared me, that I thought it might be too weird. I thought, "Well, that's okay. I know what I want to do." I don't have any idea that comics *should* be anything in particular. Comics should be whatever you want. The challenge is, does it work or not?

MARK: *Would you be interested in putting something like a flexi-disc in the comic, with music on it?*

ARN: I'd love to, as a gimmick. The thing is, it doesn't enhance the comic, as an art form itself, but yeah, that's a fun thing. I'd like them to hear my songs. I did have a NEIL THE HORSE musical on the radio, a couple of years ago, and that was a big thrill for me. It was the first time my songs really got performed in public. But I would love a disc with the characters singing the songs. And we probably will do that, sooner or later. It's more a matter of, "How many projects can I do at once?" *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Your credits? Anything before NEIL THE HORSE?*

ART: I did NEIL THE HORSE as a comic strip, too, of course.

GABRIEL MORRISSETTE: *Yeah, I saw it had a syndicate name but I wasn't familiar with the syndicate.*

ARN: A small Canadian syndicate. A friend and I actually ran it, but we lost thousands of dollars and decided, "That was enough of that." I published a couple of collections of stories that I illustrated.

MARK: *Children's?*

ARN: No, the same kind of weird mix that I've always done. Is it for children or is it

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And he finds the perfect hit man to do the job.
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ME?
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"Comics should be whatever you want."

for adults? I don't know. But I did publish — self-publish — a couple of books in the early Seventies that I made some money off, and had some comics in them. I was always sort of hankering to do comics, rather than actually doing them. I did a strip at the University of British Columbia. It was funny — I went to the university for a year, and then dropped out for a year to take a trip to Europe, and kept sending the strip in, three times a week, even from Europe. And then I went back to the university, and then dropped out for good, but kept on doing the comic strip. I didn't tell anybody I had dropped out so I could keep getting published. *(Laughter.)* So for four years I had this strip, which was a character call MORALMAN, a non-super-hero — super-hero with no super-powers whatsoever, but thought he did. He'd go around telling people what to do and constantly get himself into giant disasters.

MARK: *Your editorial comment on the super-hero?*

ARN: Yeah. It seems impossible for me to handle the subject without making fun of it. Because now I'm doing a take-off on Conan, called "Canine the Barbarian," and it's Conan with a black dog's nose.

MARK: *Conan is a character who never appealed to me very much.*

ARN: Well, I actually enjoyed CONAN. He's sort of an exception, although he's not really a super-hero. I did enjoy the early **Roy Thomas** books. But I just seem unable to touch these macho fantasies without wanting to destroy them. My "Canine" character is sure that what's going on around him is a giant adventure which should be solved with brawn and shouting and mayhem, and all the other characters are just getting along fine without this. So this reflects the current attitude, I guess, that I have toward this — finally getting back at the schoolyard bullies. Revenge after all these years!

MARK: *That is a common thread running through comic-book people.*

ARN: We were all the nerds. Exactly! Now we're going to draw all those people who used to bother us when we were kids!

MARK: *I understand Leo Bachle — who drew JOHNNY CANUCK in the 1940s — used to draw all his enemies from school as the Nazis in JOHNNY CANUCK. He was in high school at the time.* (Laughter.) *How's that for revenge?*

ARN: That's wonderful! I've never done anything like that, anything that specific, but I think to an extent any adult comic-book story is, in a way, kind of looking back over your shoulder at everybody you didn't like when you were a kid and saying, "Look — see, I told you so!"

MARK: *Exactly.*

ARN: When I was doing CBC radio, with a national audience, I knew that my relatives in Vancouver knew that I was on it, if they didn't actually hear me. And I had a set of cousins and aunts —

MARK: *Was that AM or FM?*

ARN: AM, mostly. I had a set of relatives who I didn't really like and who I used to feel were putting me down, as a kid, so I always felt, "Nyahh, Nyahh! I'm on the radio!" So here I was, a relatively serious professional broadcaster, and I was thinking to myself, "Nyahh, nyahh!" *(Laughter.)* It's really silly how much we are children underneath.

MARK: *Everyone in this business is, more or less.*

ARN: Well, that's one of the delightful things about this business. We get to be children again.

MARK: *That's another thing that runs through NEIL. In this day and age, when you have these really cynical and downright vicious books coming out, NEIL has sort of this charming innocence to it in many ways. It's a very innocent book in many ways.*

ARN: Well, thank you. Partly natural and partly calculated. I didn't think about it at

Canine the Barbarian meets Mam'selle Poupee, from NEIL THE HORSE 9.

WHO - WHAT....?
BY FRUNO! IT'S RED GERTRUDE, SHE-DEVIL WITH A SWORD!
I DO NOT 'AVE A SWORD, STUPID!
OH YEH - UH - YOU MUST BE RED ERMINTRUDE, SHE-DEVIL WITH A KNIFE AND FORK! NO? - UH - RED PENELOPE, WITH A SNOW SHOVEL!

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"The adult theme is under the surface."

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first. The calculation has come into it now because of people telling me about it, and I can't help but be self-aware and self-conscious, and in a way, it's too bad. I don't like that. I don't like being told too much about what I'm doing because then I become artificial.

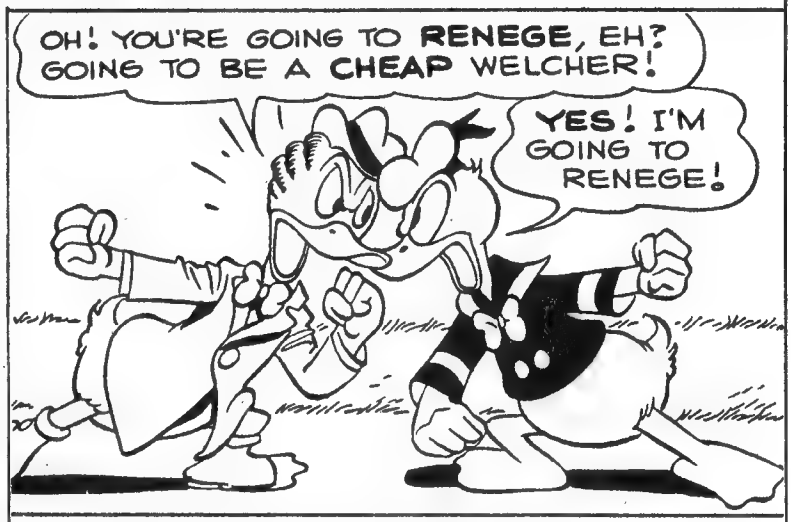
MARK: *I'm not saying that your work is in any way without meaning, because I remember a story you wrote about the suction cups on the feet, where the characters were running across the roof-tops, and there were neat little swipes at the military and official bilingualism and everything else all throughout the story. It was really neat. I notice that it takes place in a funny-animal Canada, which is really unique.*

ARN: The NEIL world flops back and forth between funny animals and funny people, almost at will. Depending on what I feel like when I'm doing the story. Sometimes it's funny animals, and sometimes it's funny people. But, yeah, I try — I hope it's true — that my stories have something to them besides light entertainment. But one doesn't like to bludgeon the reader over the head with, "Here is the moral," or even necessarily with a satirical point, like that one you're referring to. I think that's a rare story for me. I usually try to have a real good adventure or love story or comedy, whatever it is, that by its underlying — by the assumptions of the story, by the way the premise is constructed and by the way the characters interact — if one chose to look beneath the surface at what morals are at work or what social assumptions are at work, that would be where the point is. I would hope the moral or the satirical point or whatever it was — the adult theme — is under the surface, because on the surface I want it to be amusing and easy to read for kids — I don't know if I've succeeded as well as I like — I don't think I have — but that, of course, is the same as with **Barks**. That's what we adults see in **Barks**. There are times when I find him as good a writer as **Mark Twain** or **Jonathan Swift**. I'm sure **Barks** will live in history as one of the immortal writers of comedy.

MARK: *When I was a kid, I wasn't aware of who he was, of course — but I used to love the UNCLE SCROOGE stories tremendously.*

ARN: The point is that I try to emulate **Barks**, as one always tries to emulate one's heroes. I'm always delighted when a kid — six years old, eight years old, whatever — likes my work. I've even heard of two-year-olds who like just the image of Neil — they just like the way Neil looks.

GABRIEL: *Speaking of the image, when I saw Neil, I thought he was sort of similar to the early Mickey Mouse, a really bold, graphic kind of style, which Ub Iwerks developed at the Disney Studios. And I wonder if Neil isn't the spiritual child of Harry Horsecollar.*



ARN: Oh, Horace Horsecollar? Right. Well, actually I didn't think very much about Horace Horsecollar when I was developing Neil. The only thought I gave to Horace was to make sure Neil didn't look like him very much. But Neil really is — not in personality, but in design — what Mickey Mouse would be like if Mickey Mouse were a horse.

MARK: *The original Mickey Mouse.*

ARN: The original Mickey Mouse. He's got that line, that same black mask, this is totally deliberate. That white face with the mask with three points and the inner line that the early, early Mickey had, and Neil even when he started had the same pie-cut eyes, and he's got the big feet like Mickey's feet as shoes. It's a total rip-off. *(Laughter.)* I tried, for the first year or so, to make my work look as close as possible to **Gottfredson**'s work. In 1933 or so he was doing his greatest stuff. But I soon learned it was not my style. One learns as one goes on that one can't be someone else. It's pointless. I just found other influences crowding into my brain, that I wanted to bring out. And now it's evolving into whatever it is. I don't know what it is now. Neil is the holdover in the strip. Neil still looks like that, although the others have changed. What I wanted to do is be **Floyd Gottfredson** in 1933. If I couldn't be **Disney** in 1933, I wanted to be **Floyd Gottfredson** in 1933. I was trying to will myself back in time!

GABRIEL: *A similar example is Dave Sim. He was doing Barry Smith, and then became Dave Sim.*

Donald Duck -- by Carl Barks, of course.

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WESTFIELD COMICS

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"Neil, of course, provides naivete."

ARN: And apparently I'm **Arn Saba** now. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *The Barks influence in your work is not so evident to me — at least in terms of the plotting — because, even though his characters were ducks, he used straight, linear plots, and you don't. You don't seem to use linear storytelling.*

ARN: I do and I don't. It depends upon the story. I don't know if you read the long, four-part "Video Warriors" story.

MARK: *I missed that one.*

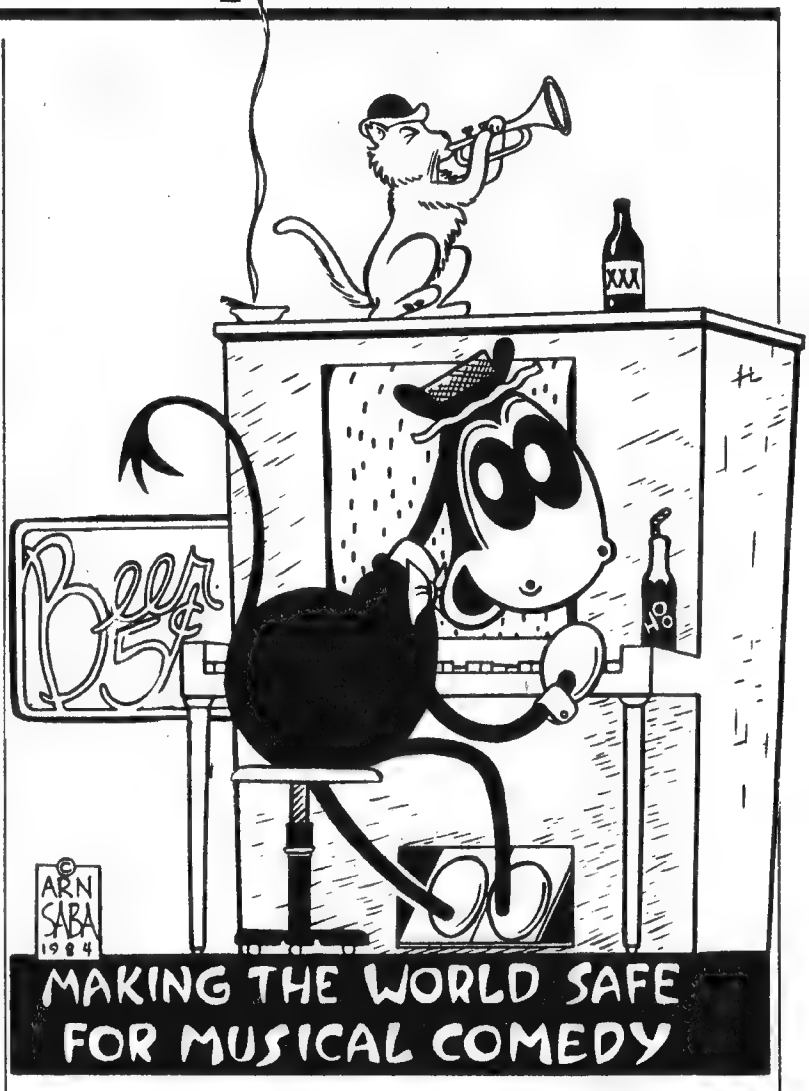
ARN: Missed it? It was four issues! *(Laughter.)* That one, I think, you'd find, is the closest to **Barks** I've done yet, except for the play, which you haven't heard. The NEIL THE HORSE radio play —

MARK: *Has that been recorded?*

ARN: It was broadcast on the CBC, but not released commercially. We are putting it out, but we're waiting until Hell freezes over. *(Laughter.)*

PIERRE FOURNIER: *But we're in Canada.*

ARN: Right — where Hell freezes over regularly. *(Laughter.)* But those two stories — the "Video Warriors" and the play — are the two most like **Barks**. Obviously there are differences, and I'm not even saying that I'm trying to be like **Barks**, but I think you'll find that they're closer to **Barks**. I know I sometimes do pretty surrealistic stories. But these are adventures with a beginning, middle and an end, and conflict — but **Barks** is much more economical in his storytelling. He's simpler, without being simplistic. He's really right on the mark, in terms of getting the story; moving and telling the story; and keeping it moving — and in a very direct way, keeping it funny. One of my burdens as a storyteller is that I have three main characters, and for a long time I fought against that and didn't want to have that many, because what it means is that you have to take into account all three of them, always. With Donald Duck, Uncle Scrooge and the three boys, they were basically alike enough in personality that they could have a unified kind of motivation in the story. They didn't have to — he didn't have to account for three different reasons for doing the same thing. But in every case in my story, the three different characters are completely different in why they would want to do something. So, it does tend to make the stories more cumbersome. I'm trying to keep my stories streamlined, like **Barks**', or like **Caniff**'s beautiful TERRY AND THE PIRATES in the 1930s. It was just slam-bang adventure all the time, but with good characterization. That's still the ideal thing. One of my ideals is just to keep it moving.



MARK: *I'm curious — you have three characters: a talking horse, a cat who smokes a cigar, and an anthropomorphic doll. Where did they come from?*

ARN: The very, very first NEIL strip I drew showed an old farm-couple who received a mysterious big crate in the mail — I don't know how it could have come through the mail, it was giant, seven feet tall — and they weren't expecting this, and they opened it up, and Neil jumped out, and proceeded to eat everything in the house, and then ran away. So that's the origin of NEIL THE HORSE. But in terms of where I got the idea for it, there really is no answer, "Well, I sat down and designed it because of this, this and this." It's more that it came out of my subconscious. I was looking around for characters to do, and I decided, in late 1974, that I was going to get serious about doing comics.I started to look back at the old strips that I am always referring to, BRINGING UP FATHER and THE KATZENJAMMER KIDS and others like that, and I realized that what was necessary was characters that were very strong in their personalities but were not tied to their situation. For example, I had previously come up with a strip that was current at that time called GRAND HOTEL that was about a co-operative house.

MARK: *Where did that appear?*

ARN: It was never published. But I worked on it for a while. It was about a bunch of hippies living in a co-op house, and it was at the point that the hippie movement was dying out. It was a comedy, sort of like MOON MULLINS. Their confusion about their identity in this changing society — in a very light-hearted way it was social satire. But I realized that unless I was going

"I don't know whether I'll keep doing

to delve into fantasy, which is really what I was more inclined to do, I was really tied to those characters. It was not universal enough. I was looking for characters who could go anywhere, be anything, do anything, without losing their personalities.

MARK: *GARFIELD is tied to being an orange cat in a house with a funny dog and all that stuff, and that's about it.*

ARN: Precisely. That's one of the most limiting concepts you could imagine. It's not likely that Garfield is suddenly going to take a trip to the moon and encounter a bunch of aliens or something —

MARK: *That's exactly what happens in one of the children's storybooks.*

ARN: Well, you would almost have to do it in a children's storybook. I was walking down the street one day, after thinking about this for months, and suddenly Neil and Soapy popped into my head. Bang! There they were! In a thought balloon over my head. How they looked, their personalities — everything. Poupee came along the same way, about three or four years later. Just walked into the strip — literally, just walked into it — and never away. I thought, "Mam'selle Poupee — what a great name! What a great character!" It was just amazing. It was partly by evolution and partly by planning, but I managed to work it out that the characters were universal, or what I hoped is "universal," in the sense that they represent types, and I think that with those three, I have a pretty broad range of types. I have Neil, the child, basically; Soapy, the cynical, worldly wise adult; and Poupee, not innocent, but hopeful — the adult who still wants to achieve and strive for things, and therefore can be disappointed, where Soapy knows everything. He's been there, he's seen it, you can't fool him or surprise him. He's totally competent. He supplies good counterbalance to the other two. Neil, of course, provides naivete. He's the Candide character who asks questions and reveals the folly of the wise man. Even so, I don't like to get too heavy with that. I always like to pull back from bludgeoning anything. I think that at least for now it provides a pretty wide range of situations for me. They can go different places all the time.

MARK: *And meet new friends.*

ARN: And now with Canine in the Hyborian Age —

GABRIEL: *You don't explain how? He's just there?*

ARN: I thought about that a long time. Whether there should be an explanation. **Barks** kept his characters in the twentieth century, and if they went to some other time or place, they would always go by some device.

MARK: *Yeah, but Donald Duck in one episode would be a security guard and in another episode he'd be sitting at home at a desk. Barks never bothered with continuity–*

ARN: In terms of the jobs, but he didn't put them in different centuries. I thought about that and thought, "What the heck, it's just a fantasy anyway."

NEIL the HORSE
I CAN'T SLEEP! SLEEPING OUTSIDE IS SCARY!
OH, THANKS FER TELLIN' ME ....I HADN'T NOTICED!
HEY SOAPY! WAKE UP!
HUH? WHASSAMATTER WIT' YOU? YA T'INK YER A ROOSTER?
YAWN!

An example of the very early NEIL -- 1975 (from the newspaper strip, fourth week). "Neil is what Mickey Mouse would be like if Mickey Mouse were a horse."

I don't know if I've gone where I'd like to go, so far, with NEIL, as far as the universality of the characters. But I keep trying to do that, and I don't know whether I'll keep doing Neil and Mam'selle Poupee all my life. I love the characters but I have other characters I'd like to do as well. Whether or not I'd like to keep doing those same three at the same time... There are sort of two ways you can go as a cartoonist — you can either be continually turning out new characters and concepts, or else you can get one set of characters and mine that for all they're worth. For better or worse, I seem to be in that second category, although I do have ideas for other characters and other types of stories..

MARK: *Well, your format is so flexible, if you ever had another character you could run it as a backup feature or whatever.*

ARN: You mean in the format of a comic book?

MARK: *Yeah.*

ARN: Oh, I have other comics that I want to do that are entirely different in concept. I have a concept for one that's a PRINCE VALIANT type of adventure, a realistic, medieval or Renaissance period.

MARK: *Do you have a realistic style as well?*

ARN: No, I'd have to have someone else draw that. But I could lay it out and write it. Oh, I have grandiose schemes for having minions. *(Laughter.)*

(Gabriel waves his hand enthusiastically.)

MARK: (to Gabriel) *You want to be a minion...*

GABRIEL: *I'm already yours.* (Laughter.)

ARN: Everybody needs a minion.

MARK: *You worked for CBC?*

ARN: I was a freelancer for a number of years. I should explain for those who don't know what it is — I always tell Americans that it's the equivalent of the BBC, which they seem to know about. The CBC is the government-owned, but not government-controlled, national radio and TV network.

MARK: *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.*

ARN: That's right. At times it can be amazingly *avant garde* and liberal and sort of wonderful, and at times it can be stultifying and boring and hidebound, especially when you work there.

MARK: *Based in Toronto?*

ARN: It was the national network but based in Toronto, and I was mainly talking about comics. I started out going on air, being interviewed by other people talking about comics, and gradually I got to the point

© 1975 Arn Saba

Neil and Mam'selle Poupee all my life."

THERE ISN'T ENOUGH DOORS AROUND HERE.!
THERE'S AN OLD SAYING I PICKED UP IN THE GOBI DESERT: "WHEN THERE IS NO ROOF, THERE IS NOTHING TO FALL ON HEAD".
WHY DON'T YOU MEDITATE?
BUT SOMETHING MIGHT BITE ME!
IT'LL BE ME, IN ABOUT FIVE SECONDS!
YER SEEKIN' YER FORTUNE, AIN'TCHA? WELL, THIS IS IT. GO SLEEP ON THE RAILROAD TRACK! GOODNIGHT!
© 1975 ARN SABA

where I was producing my own shows, sort of semi-offically. I was mostly involved with the **Don Harron** show, MORNINGSIDE, the most popular national talk show, doing half-hour segments, talking about the famous comics. But what I would do to prepare for that — I would not just sit there and talk — I would interview two or three other people who had something to do with it, either the creator of the strip or, if the creator was dead, someone who knew him. So I'd have clips of my interviews to play, plus I'd have skits based on the strips, and I would produce those with actors and sound effects, and I would be in those myself.

MARK: *I would like to have heard those.*

ARN: I did around fifty. I did dozens of them. I did some for Saturday morning, too — plus I did a lot of critiques of musical comedy and theatre history — and then I got to the point where I was producing a lot of other kinds of documentaries and hosting programs sometimes, when the real hosts were away. I'd be the guest host. I also did a six-part program, A CRITICAL THEORY OF COMIC STRIPS, in which I tried to formulate a set of critical terms with which to evaluate comics and concepts. I tried to find out what was unique to the comic strip. I interviewed a lot of the greats, the greats of the comic strip world. I travelled all over the States doing that, and phoned Europe and talked to some of the people over there. Tried to get some sense of what's possible with the medium and judge it. Because if you take a comic and judge it by the standards of a novel or any other piece of writing or gallery art, you usually get a very low opinion of comics. So I was trying to get at what ways we can look at comics, that does not put them down. Because my contention is that the greatest pop art today is the High Art of tomorrow. **Shakespeare** was pop art then. So the whole concept of High Art *versus* Low Art had to be considered.

Anyway, it went on and on. I'm not going to burden you with the whole thing. But that's the kind of thing I did. The CBC gives you the ability to do that. I think at one time I took a survey of all the women in comics, and had them talk about the image of women in comics. Anyway, that's the kind of thing I was doing, and it was great, but I finally got to the point where I was tired of doing it and once again I caught myself by the collar and said, "Hey, are you going to do comics, or are you going to talk about comics all your life?" And I got really tired of talking about these great things that other people had done. They were wonderful cartoonist and did great work, but, gee, no one was going to say that about me unless I got on with it. So I decided to get on with it. *(Laughter.)* I took a seventy-five percent reduction of my income and got into comics!

MARK: *You're a very brave person.*

ARN: You have to be. I don't want to paint myself as a martyr or anything, but all my life I've been fortunate to have the lack of fear of doing what I wanted to do. I've never had a job in my life. I've always done more — or less — my own work. It doesn't scare me. I don't have any designs on security. At least, monetarily. I don't believe those things exist and to Hell with them. If I get killed tomorrow I'll be able to know my life was a good one.

NEXT: "why aren't there more girls at comics conventions?"...the questions you have to deal with when you're a heterosexual man...Los Bros. Hernandez meet Walt Disney...plus more about Mam'selle Poupee, Soapy and, of course, Neil the Horse!

I WONDER IF HE WAS MAD.
HERE'S THE RAILROAD TRACK. IS IT SUPPOSED TO BE COMFORTABLE?
GEE, SOAPY'S RIGHT. THIS IS JUST LIKE A FEATHER BED, EXCEPT FOR NO FEATHERS....
ZZZZ
WATCH OUT, NEIL! HERE COMES OL' NINETY-NINE — TEN HOURS LATE, AS USUAL, AND BURNING THE FREIGHT TO LIGHTEN THE LOAD.
GEE! GOLLY! WOW! WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN?

TITAN

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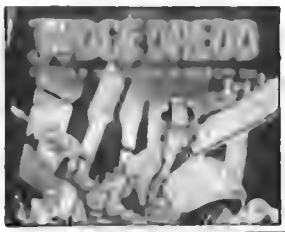

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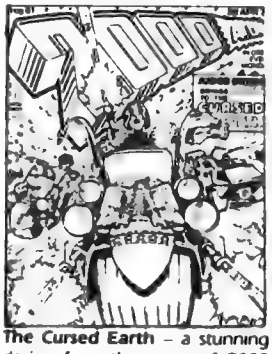
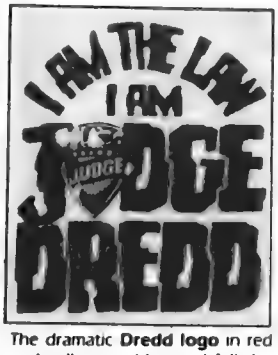


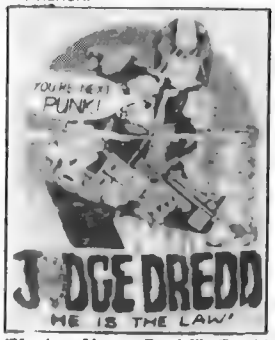
The Cursed Earth – a stunning design from the cover of 2000 A.D. No. 61, drawn by Mike McMahon.



The dramatic **Dredd logo** in red and yellow, emblazoned full-size across this shirt. Two colours.

Dredd on the Seat of Justice, reading the Book of the Law. Drawn by Brian Bolland. White on black.

The horrific face of **Judge Death** – guaranteed to scare your friends! Drawn by Brian Bolland. White on black.



"You're Next, Punk!" Dredd speaks out in this conversation-stealing design, drawn by Mike McMahon.

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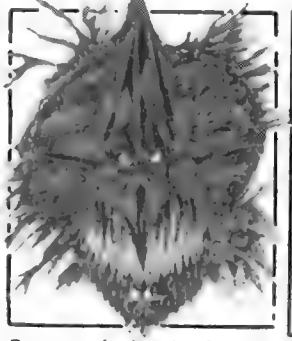
The colourful band of heroic **robot warriors,** dramatically on their way into action! Drawn by Mike McMahon.



Torquemada, bursting from the chest of this horrific shirt! An original design drawn by Kevin O'Neill.

Sam Slade, top **Robo-Hunter,** with associates Kidd, Cutie and Hoagy! Drawn by Ian Gibson.

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"JUDGE DREDD was a morally reprehen-

sible character in the role of the hero."

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BRIAN BOLLAND

Brian Bolland is one of a number of British comics creators who has transferred to American comics and great acclaim over the past three years. This interview took place at Brian's Central London flat on a mild October evening, and was punctuated with interruptions by Brian's two cats and his impromptu rendition on the musical saw...

FRANK PLOWRIGHT: *Let's start with your first strip work, shall we?*

BRIAN BOLLAND: The first regular strip work I did was POWER MAN, produced by Pickin Publications of Suffolk, who were selling it in Nigeria. Just after **Dave Gibbons** and I had finished doing it THE COMICS JOURNAL ran an article about these racist and imperialistic comics produced in Britain for South Africa. It rather hurt us at the time, because we didn't think we were being racist or imperialistic.

FRANK: *I thought that strip was solely for Nigeria.*

BRIAN: It was originally published in Nigeria and then reprinted in various African countries, including South Africa, but by then it was out of our hands. I think that Dave explained the whole situation in an interview that's already appeared in this magazine.

FRANK: *Some other early work of yours that turns up every now and then is LITTLE NYMPHO IN SLUMBERLAND, obviously based on the Windsor McKay strip LITTLE NEMO IN WONDERLAND. Where did you first come across Mckay?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Brian Bolland
Born: 26 March 1951
Sex: Male
Place of Birth: Butterwick, near Boston, Lincolnshire, England
Favorite President: Pass.
Favorite Ruler: King Zog of Albania (now deceased)
Favorite Film Director: Andrei Tarkovski
Favorie Music Group: The Residents (enigmatic weirdos from San Francisco)
Favorite Comic Artist: Alex Toth
Favorite Animal: The Hedgehog
Religion: None (pagan leanings)
Left: Handed
Favorite Place: Urumqi, North West China/Flagstaff, Arizona

BRIAN: Before I was apparently being racist, I was being sexist with LITTLE NYMPHO. That was done in 1971, when I was working for the underground magazines, and the general criteria for doing any kind of work for the underground magazines was that it had to be obscene or offensive. I was drawing comic strips about venereal diseases and all kinds of terrible things, so a completely sexist character like Little Nympho was just second nature to me. I first came across LITTLE NEMO in a magazine called LINUS, which was a French publication devoted to looking at comic strips from all over the world — it was named after the character from the PEANUTS strip — and one issue was published as a British edition, and it had a very good article about LITTLE NEMO. That was the first time I encountered the strip and I thought it was lovely stuff. I then found that big Italian book, which was later reprinted in English, so I think **Windsor McKay** was quite well-known even then.

FRANK: *It's curious that the Europeans were more concerned with preserving the American comic-strip classics — that the Italians produced a book of material that wasn't readily available in the USA.*

BRIAN: Yes. At the same time there was a childrens' book that it was really trendy

"I've pursued perfection at great expense."

THE BIZARRE WEIGHT-WATCHERS GUIDE, from Bolland's blue period. "At the time I was innocent...not thinking for a moment that it was offensive."

to have a copy of, WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE by **Maurice Sendak**, and his second book was done in the style of LITTLE NEMO IN WONDERLAND with the thin linework and the thick outline.

FRANK: *So that was the first strip you regularly drew?*

BRIAN: Well, it wasn't regular. I liked the idea of taking the innocence of LITTLE NEMO and reversing it to get the hedonistic delights of LITTLE NYMPHO.

FRANK: *So that's sexist, racist... I wonder what else we can have you up for? Maybe this strip, THE BIZARRE WEIGHT WATCHERS GUIDE. I take it that's from the Brian Bolland blue period.*

BRIAN: At the time, I was innocent and didn't realize that I was offending anybody. I'd just seen SWEET GWENDOLINE or that sort of story somewhere. I think I was in Paris and I bought a book called LES FILLES DU PAPIER, which was all about women in comics. There was a lot about BARBARELLA and a section on the fetish comics, which were fascinating for obvious reasons, particularly the way that they were drawn. There was the attention to detail that's the hallmark of the fetishist.

I was once on a train sitting opposite a nurse and we were talking about what we did. I told her I was an art student and into comics, and showed her a sample of my artwork — not thinking for a moment that it was offensive in any way. It was just stylistically interesting and I'd done lots of studies of that sort of thing and didn't think for a moment that anybody could be offended.

Now, in this totally different climate, I squirm with embarrassment to look at it. Less so with THE BIZARRE WEIGHT-WATCHERS GUIDE, because it's quite reasonably drawn.

FRANK: *2000AD couldn't have been long after that strip.*

BRIAN: **Dave Gibbons** was in on 2000AD from the start, and I did a few covers. Then **Nick Landau**, who was editor at the time, got me to do JUDGE DREDD. A chap named **Bill Ward**, who used to be art director at BUSTER, did one half of the "Mega City 5000" story and I concluded it.

(At this point, the record ends and Brian goes over to the turntable and flips it to side two. It's Robert Crumb and his Cheap Suit Serenaders.)

FRANK: *I've never heard Crumb's records before and always assumed that he was rather a dilettante for producing them, but this is very accomplished!*

BRIAN: I think **Crumb's** music is better than his art, and I have a very high regard for the art. I heard some of this music on the radio and bought a couple of records of **Robert Crumb** music that I really grew to love. Through him I ws introduced to traditional American 20th century music, which was derived from a whole load of curious pigeonholes of American folk music. There's a chap called **Robert Armstrong**...

FRANK: *Is he the same one who produces MICKEY RAT?*

BRIAN: I've never heard of MICKEY RAT. I only know **Robert Armstrong** as a very good instrumentalist with this group and being very well versed in all the traditions of 20th century American music. I can read all the sleeve notes he writes for Blue Goose and Rounder Records and he's a real source of information.

FRANK: *It's fascinating that these two guys who produced what for the times were very outrageous and anarchic comics are very much traditionalists and archivists with regard to music.*

BRIAN: There is a feeling of **Max Fleisher** about **Robert Crumb's** artwork, a Thirties look — even though he was dealing with all the things that were going on in the undergrounds during the 1960s.

FRANK: *We've been meandering here. "When we left Brian at 2000AD, he'd just been handed his first strip."*

BRIAN: I didn't do it particularly well, I'm afraid. I remember that **Mike Friedrich** was visiting 2000AD on that day that I brought my first Judge Dredd episode in and he

© 1984 Brian Bolland

"Dredd is a component of a police state."

© 1985 Eagle Comics

didn't like it at all. I think he thought that it was too violent.

FRANK: *I don't think I've ever heard that criticism levelled against DREDD before. I suppose after sexism, and racism, the violence of DREDD was a natural progression.* (Laughter.)

BRIAN: Fascism is more accurate. He is a component of a police state. It was very complicated working on DREDD, because I know he was a morally reprehensible character — but he was in the role of the hero, the main figure in the story that the reader identified with, even though he was a dubious character. I knew full well that he was not the kind of man that I could identify with at all, so I was always trying to draw him in an unsympathetic way.

FRANK: *But John Wagner doesn't take him seriously at all.*

BRIAN: Oh no, but Dredd is played as the straight man, he doesn't make a fool of himself. You can't laugh at him because he's stupid. He's flawless. You find yourself laughing at his extreme position, because of the extreme opposites he comes across.

FRANK: *You've obviously got a fondness for DREDD, though, because you're still drawing the Eagle Comics covers today.*

BRIAN: Oh, yes — I can't help having a fondness for the character. It's strange that you can have such a two-dimensional character that I find infinitely fascinating. In reviews, I've read that people find him two-dimensional, but I like the situation of this robotic figure and the way that he functions in a completely anarchic world.

FRANK: *The two-dimensionality can be ascribed to the difference between British and American comics, though. Soap opera has usurped all else in the USA whereas, in British comics, the plot is more important than the characters.*

BRIAN: That's quite true. I think the pace of a British comics story is much faster. More gets packed into a six-page JUDGE DREDD story than into 25 pages of a lot of American comics, but then there is more room for soul-searching and girlfriend or boyfriend problems in an American comic. For instance, I think CAMELOT 3000 was taking its time...

FRANK: *I was going to get to that later.*

BRIAN: I mean in terms of plot. Some of my colleagues working in British comics kept coming up to me and asking "When does the story start?" The pacing is different. When you have a weekly six-page slot, there's often a whole segment of story. In JUDGE DREDD's case it would be a twelve-page segment carried over two weeks. Of course, having six pages of story was revolutionary in British comics when 2000AD started in 1977, because before that the maximum was three pages!

FRANK: *But they had much smaller panels.*

BRIAN: Yes, they would often have 12 panels to a page and six stories in a comic.

FRANK: *So 2000AD showcased the artwork more than previous comics in the UK?*

BRIAN: I don't think that it was setting out to say "Hey, fans — look at this wonderful artwork." Something provoked IPC to produce a science-fiction comic and **Pat Mills, John Wagner** and **Kelvin Gosnell** among them got 2000AD going. I don't know why they decided to run stories that were six pages long instead of three, although some have said that it was the American comics influence. But none of them are interested in American comics, and at least two of them were completely averse to them.

FRANK: *British comics require tighter deadlines, I presume.*

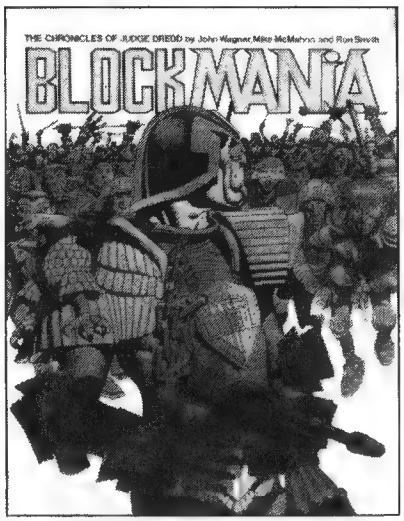
BRIAN: It was okay at 2000AD, really. **Carlos Ezquerra** could turn out six or seven pages of art a week, but none of the rest of us could do that, so we had to rotate — meaning that there were at least three of us working on JUDGE DREDD at any time. I was the slowest of the three, so when I took my episode in they'd give me another to draw that would be far enough ahead to give me time.

FRANK: *You're considered by most fans to be the definitive JUDGE DREDD artist, whereas Mike McMahon and Ron Smith have done more pages than you...*

BRIAN: Mike had always done more than me, and **Ron Smith** subsequently went on to draw more after I left. I've always thought that Mike was a giant. He warns me off going on about his great talents in public and, consequently, I've reined in a little in saying how wonderful his artwork was and is,

Cover detail from Eagle's DREDD.

TITAN BOOKS



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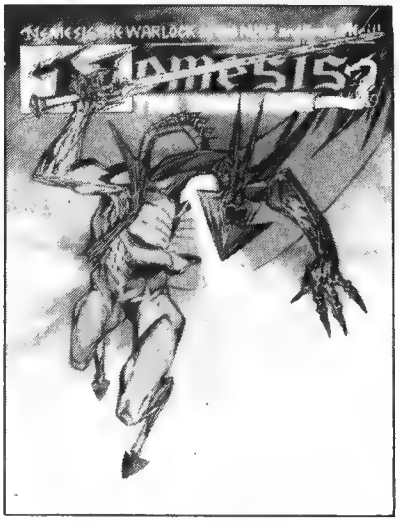

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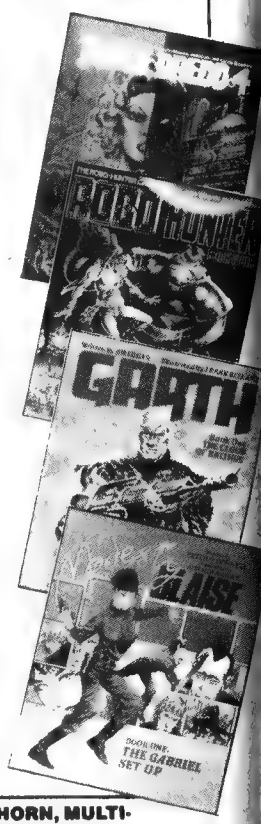

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"Green Lantern's constantly misused."

to the extent that people now think that I don't like his work.

FRANK: *Well, put that right!*

BRIAN: In my view, there are a few great stylists in the comic-book art field. **Jack Kirby** and **Gil Kane** are masters and — before then — there were the great strip stylists like **Milt Caniff**. **Gil Kane** refined human anatomy and everything else he was drawing to a style that was ultra-real. It wasn't realism any more, but it was completely correct within its own rules, and **Jack Kirby** is the same. You can't look at his art and say, "That's badly drawn," because it's all perfectly drawn within the rules of the style that he's evolved.

A lot of people imitate these stylists, but Mike created something that I've never seen before. I can't think of any other artist who could have influenced him into that way of working. He's more interested in the Spanish artists and Europeans than American artists, but he's developed a grotesque kind of figure and world that is absolutely extraordinary. There's almost a kind of madness in there somewhere. I think he's one of the great stylists. He really shook up the JUDGE DREDD stuff that was being done, evolving the character single-handedly. I think that **Ian Gibson** was always trying to keep up with Mike's evolution, and I was hanging in there for dear life, because I have a more literal approach to a strip. If a script requires that I draw this, I literally draw what's required of me, I don't go off into

Detail from the cover of GREEN LANTERN 127

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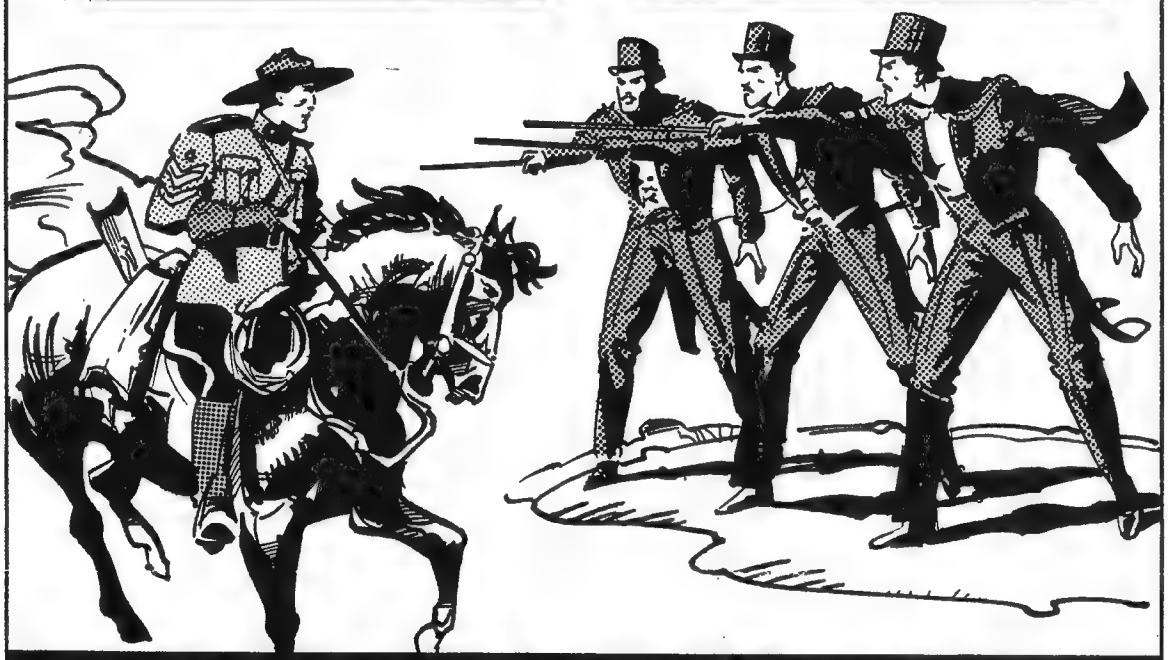

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"It was quite an alien thing to have a more-or-less naked person flying."

excess the way Mick did, and I would only push myself as a result of looking at the way that he was going beyond what was asked for. So a really great character came about and, because I had the more American-oriented style, I ended up as one that everyone thought of as the definitive DREDD artist.

FRANK: *And after JUDGE DREDD you went to the USA?*

BRIAN: Joe Staton was drawing GREEN LANTERN when he came over here for a convention. He drew a BLACKHAWK episode for 2000AD, and I swapped and produced a GREEN LANTERN cover. I was always a big fan of Green Lantern and still think that he's one of DC's best characters, constantly misused. Joe rang up **Jack C. Harris**, who was editor at the time, and mentioned that he'd got a real fan who'd like to draw something, and Jack said, "Okay, put him on the cover." He'd come across JUDGE DREDD somehow and like my stuff, so he knew what he was getting. That was the cover for GREEN LANTERN #127. He liked it sufficiently to commission me to do two or three more and some for TALES OF THE GREEN LANTERN CORPS.

I'd begun to get a bit bogged down with JUDGE DREDD, because the deadlines were wrapping themselves around my neck and I was beginning to lose my self respect. Spending a lot of time failing to get artwork in on time gives you a crisis of confidence, and I began to feel that I'd burned out on the character, and I got such a wonderful feeling of fannish delight from doing the DC characters with whom I'd grown up.

FRANK: *A friend of mine contends that Green Lantern has a wonderful costume with that green, black and white, but that no one has been able to draw it properly since Gil Kane.*

BRIAN: Len Wein came to stay here for a week, last summer, when he and **Dave Gibbons** were working on the character together — and I remember rooting out the first ten issues of GREEN LANTERN and pointing them out to Dave, saying "Look at the black on this costume and notice how it's all black apart from the white glint running down the arms and legs." I don't think a lot of artists have got the fact that it's a shiny black material too well. They leave a lot of the black areas of the costume too white, and all that grey fills in. About issue #25, a weird thing happened. The green armholes slipped over Green Lantern's shoulder and, month by month, they would gradually change until the green was an X shape!

FRANK: *If that were at Marvel, they'd probably have written a story about how the costume was taking him over.* (Laughter.)

BRIAN: So, **Gil Kane** was able to redesign the costume gradually, possibly without the editor knowing. It was nice to see **Gil Kane** drawing the recent annual.

FRANK: *Your next DC work was the stunning Starro covers for the JLA, which were produced "on spec."*

BRIAN: I had been appearing at DC every summer for four consecutive years. The first time I went, **Paul Levitz** — not knowing who the hell I was — gave me the standard tour of the premises and away. The next year, one or two people knew me through liking JUDGE DREDD, and the third year I was taken out, wined and dined and I met all sorts of people. The year after that, I was appearing at conventions and having to promote CAMELOT 3000. Now I'm back to the standard quick tour of DC and out! I met **Len Wein** at the Seacon convention in 1979, and at that point there was a lot of interest in luring people like me away from 2000AD into the American scene, and he seemed very enthusiastic about me doing this or that

Early character studies for CAMELOT.

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"I was obsessed with pencilling CAMELOT

— so the next year that I went to DC, I had a cover ready draw, which was the Starro JUSTICE LEAGUE cover.

I had to change it around quite a bit because they wanted Superman's chest insignia visible, and by the time it was printed Zatanna had changed her costume, so I had to stick a patch on with her new costume. And after reading FLASH for twenty years, I hadn't noticed that the lightning bolt on his chest only had three zig zags, and not four as I'd drawn.

FRANK: *And then on to CAMELOT 3000. Did you have to modify your style at all for the USA?*

BRIAN: I decided that I was enjoying being connected with DC so much that I'd work for them regularly, and they offered me CAMELOT. Since I'd agreed to work for them, I was prepared to take anything — I wasn't going over there with any pretensions that I was anything special, because I knew that I would have to teach myself to work in the American scheme of things from scratch.

I remember sitting in a spare room at DC trying to think up what the Camelot characters were going to look like, only having a very vague idea of what **Mike Barr** had in mind for them at that stage, when **Julie Schwartz** came charging in and said "Draw me a cover," and I said that I would. I think I was trying to overcompensate and draw DC stuff exactly the way I thought people at DC would like it — and finding that it was quite an alien thing to have a more-or-less naked person flying. It's something you don't find in JUDGE DREDD, so I had to produce a grace and flowing line that wasn't really required in British comics. **Joe Orlando** gave me a pep talk on what the figure looks like in motion and how a figure ought to look when it was flying.

In the end, with CAMELOT, I felt that I could draw it more the way that I wanted to, because it was being promoted as "**Mike Barr** and **Brian Bolland's** CAMELOT 3000," so having heard that, I assumed that it was going to be a comic book the way that I normally make something look.

FRANK: *I was pleased that the covers were yours as well.*

BRIAN: Len wanted covers from me, but wanted to keep editorial control over them, with me over the ocean — so he had **Ross Andru** lay them out. Much as I respect **Ross Andru**, it's difficult to work over his layout without making it look like a **Ross Andru** drawing. One of the great hallmarks of a **Ross Andru** cover that I noticed way back when I was reading METAL MEN comics was that he always used to draw a diagonal line across the bottom of the page so that everything was on an inclined plane, going uphill. The angle was taken from worm's eye view and your point of view was somehow resting on a line that was drawn diagonally to the bottom of the page. He used that technique on the cover of CAMELOT 3000 #2.

FRANK: *Wasn't there also an abortive cover to issue #1 that was later used as a promo shot?*

BRIAN: Oh, yes. When I received the cover layouts, I thought in my rather headstrong way that I would show them that I could layout a good cover, so I produced a cover that was not based on the layout given and it didn't work out very well. Len decided not to use it on the cover and gave me a dressing down, telling me to get on with the cover as specified.

FRANK: *Something that always struck me as strange about CAMELOT 3000, when it was first released, was that it was produced on the Strontium 90 resistant paper and sold at $1.50 — obviously a project aimed at the fans. Yet the people producing it were Mike Barr, who wasn't that well known...*

BRIAN: ...and myself, who was a complete unknown.

FRANK: *Quite. Did that occur to you at the time?*

BRIAN: I knew I was going to be drawing a twelve-part book, and there was talk of it being on some fancy paper, but I'd not seen this stuff and assumed it wasn't going to be anything really different. When it eventually materialized, CAMELOT didn't look like any comic book I'd ever seen!

FRANK: *What about the coloring?*

BRIAN: Ah, well — I did see the coloring *(laughter)* and flinched. There was one scene in issue #1 in Stonehenge, and I know what Stonehenge is like — a grey, atmospheric sort of place. At least, it was before they put the gift shop around it. The colors that **Tatjana Wood** would normally use for a comic to be printed on the usual paper would be muted, and would probably look okay, but on this non-absorbent paper they looked dayglo and screaming. That just wasn't the atmosphere that I knew existed at that place, so I wasn't happy with the coloring for quite a while. You can use more muted colors on that paper and **Tatjana** toned her colors down. I kept writing notes on the artwork saying "For God's sake give me a beige, give me khaki!"

FRANK: *How did you feel about the way that CAMELOT developed generally?*

BRIAN: I think it was a very grand scheme on the part of Mike. He was a scholar of the Arthurian literature and he was particularly interested in the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot triangle. In order to bring them back into a future world, he invented

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. . . I was trying to dominate the inker."

the alien invasion of Earth — which is a pretty huge event and could have all kinds of repercussions and interesting aspects. But, as a result of this invasion, the original set-up of Arthur and the whole team came out of the past and the love triangle and the intrigues were there all over again — and when Tristan came back as a girl, that led to all sorts of possibilities . . .

FRANK: *. . . which were exploited to the full.*

BRIAN: *(Laughter.)* Actually, I was the one who said "Well, what about Isolde?" and Mike and I decided that for inconvenience's sake she would also be a women, and that could be a fascinating situation. So the inter-relationship of all these characters became the most interesting part of the book. I was always worried about what was going on in a world being overrun by hordes of big green creatures, who were doing terrible things to mankind, while our crowd were mooching about having love affairs and sneaking around the bushes.

FRANK: *On behalf of all CAMELOT readers who see this, I'd better enquire about the delays with the artwork for the last few issues. Actually, it was okay until about issue #9.*

BRIAN: The book hadn't been scheduled until I'd drawn issue #3 or #4, so I did have a few months head start at the beginning — and, even then, I was actually waiting around between issues for another script to come. I had the time to draw Zirk for WARRIOR in between the scripts for issues #1 and #2. I was never quite able to do the work within a month, and I was getting more and more obsessed with pencilling in such a way that I was trying to dominate the inker. No insult intended to the inkers, but I was getting so possessive about what the book looked like that I was trying to turn in pencilled artwork in an inked style, which took a hell of a long time. I felt that — as it was a twelve-issue series — it had to look better and better, so I was trying to put more detail and more finish into the pages as time went on, and I was spending up to two and a half days pencilling one page quite a lot of the time — especially with the last issue.

FRANK: *Which should be out before this interview!*

BRIAN: Well, I've been informed that, to my horror, it's now going to be printed on the 18th of December and will be in the shops at the beginning of the new year.

FRANK: *Why "to your horror?"*

BRIAN: After I'd finished the last issue, I thought, "Thank God for that, and it's only six weeks now before it will come out, which will make it only five months late." And, quite sensibly, they're now having to re-advertise it so that the kids who started reading the series, who're now grown men with whiskers, are reminded what this thing was. So they're re-advertising it and that will put it back by another three months.

I think that, because I was trying to ink in pencil, no time was gained by having somebody else ink it. I don't think that my inked artwork would take much longer than my pencil artwork and there are things that you can do with ink that you can't always

Samples of Brian's "inking" with a pencil -- from CAMELOT 3000, of course.

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"DC & Eagle were talking about BATMAN MEETS JUDGE DREDD, written by Alan Moore."

foresee in pencil. There are different ways of putting on the line which you can't dictate in the pencil approach that would be essential ingredients in the atmosphere of the story.

FRANK: *Then again, the corporate requirement for an inker isn't as necessary these days, with the number of limited projects going on.*

BRIAN: There is more of an attitude towards the prima donna in comics now, with the likes of **Frank Miller.**

FRANK: *Would you call him a prima donna?*

BRIAN: I think so. Anyone who can completely take over every aspect of a comic book, even down to what part of the cover the DC logo should fit, is a creator indulging himself to the nth degree. The end result could be fantastic, and in the case of RONIN it was an extraordinary end product, but I wonder whether that's what people really want from a comic.

FRANK: *I understand that RONIN didn't sell as well as expected, but it may have been aimed at the wrong market by selling it to the traditional comics fan.*

BRIAN: I found I was outraged at just how far Frank was pushing the medium of comic-book art. I wish I could be outraged more often.

FRANK: *I thought the art was excellent, but from what I read, the story was minimal.*

BRIAN: I think I felt that way, too.

FRANK: *Since CAMELOT you've been doing covers for JUDGE DREDD and, at one point, there was talk of you drawing another project involving Dredd.*

BRIAN: For quite a while DC and Eagle, working under license from IPC, were talking about doing a BATMAN MEETS JUDGE DREDD comic. A synopsis was written by **Alan Moore** a while ago, but due to the usual complications when companies — be they major or minor — try to get together, after a lot of haggling and discussing and countless attempts to convince IPC that Batman was a viable character — "Who is this Batman character? Didn't they have some sort of TV series about him once?" — the whole thing fell through.

The story synopsis that Alan handed in seemed a very interesting idea. The whole premise would have been that Judge Dredd is an organ of the law whereas Batman represents justice, and the story revolved around the conflict between these two, and the misunderstandings that would arise from the two completely different ways of looking at how society is run. The two would be mutually incompatible.

FRANK: *You'd be able to toss Batman into Mega City One and lose him!*

BRIAN: There was that problem, that he would get swamped by an environment that was as rich and confusing as Mega City One, which is as big a star of the JUDGE DREDD stories as the main character. Each character would have spent a bit of time in the other's environment, and there was the danger that the Mega City would look more interesting than Gotham, but Alan was convinced that Gotham as seen through his eyes would be just as extraordinary as anything else you could imagine.

It was all very much under wraps for a while, but now that there's no possibility of it coming about...

FRANK: *...everyone should write to IPC and say that they want to see it. A deluge of letters ought to be addressed to John Purdey, c/o IPC Comics Division, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London SE1.*

Since that fell through, you've been doing DREDD covers. What with them and the portfolio pieces, it seems you're having more fun with design than with sequential art.

BRIAN: That's interesting, because I've always been very bad at page layouts. **Trve Goring's** great strength is very nice page composition, because that's the thing that interests him most, but it's often to the detriment of his storytelling. I've never been very interested in the actual layout of the page, or the technique, composition and balance of the page. I've always been interested in the individual panel and what's in it, and actually having to fit them all on a page is a bit of a problem. In the past I've bogged down in trying to do flashy page layouts, when it's an area that I'm not interested in — I'd rather stick with regular-sized rectangular boxes and get the story told as well as possible within the boxes. So I'm more interested in the narrative than composition and design at all times. Even when I'm doing covers, and it's only one picture, I'm trying to get across an image which is in itself a story, or at least an intriguing trailer to a story that makes you want to find out how this situation came about and how it develops. Even that is a form of concentrating on the narrative rather than the design.

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"Judge Dredd is an organ of the law—

FRANK: *And that leads us conveniently into your portfolio...*

BRIAN: Some while ago, I remember saying that I thought that people who spent their time doing limited edition prints were wasting everybody's time and money. I bought **Will Eisner's** set of prints and **Neal Adams'** set of prints and that's about all, since I resented the fact that these comic-book artists were concentrating their time on doing these fancy print portfolios, when they ought to be getting on with drawing comics.

The thing is that a writer stores up words. He studies and listens to the way that people talk to one another and the way that circumstances come together to make stories, and his head is full of the technique of storytelling. An artist looks at images and stores these images in his mind for the future — but, unfortunately, no writer is ever going to tap this reserve of visual images stored in the artist's brain.

Recently, a French publisher, Editions Deesse, got a lot of the American artists, one British artist — me — and a few French artists, and had them produce work for a portfolio. For once, I was given the chance of just filling a blank space with anything. I thought I'd never be able to work without a script, but I found that the images were ganging up to get out and be first onto the page. They're images that are too complicated to relate to a story; they couldn't be told in words — so that's now an excuse as to why I've changed my mind and the reason why I'm doing six prints. They'll probably be completely fascinating to me and no one else will like them.

FRANK: *I think that portfolios by comics artists have developed their own set of cliches that are as bad as the comics. Skimpy costumes, matallic phallic symbols...*

BRIAN: There's nothing very special about them, they're just comic-book panels, but they fail because you can't read a story. But there are people like **Wrightson**, whose technique is so lovely that it's just nice to look at him doing Frankenstein.

FRANK: *I loved Wrightson's illustration for the SUPERMAN #400 portfolio — even better than yours. With yours, there was a peculiar effect with the light shining through the glasses.*

BRIAN: Yes, everybody's told me that that didn't work. At some stage, I've seen somebody with specs on, with a light shining up their nose, and it had the effect of focusing light on their forehead. You saw the shadow of the rim of the glasses, which gave them a demonic look, and there was a way that the prism at the edge of the glass concentrated that light in the shadow — but a lot of people thought that it looked like goggles, so in that respect it didn't work, yet I liked it.

FRANK: *I'd like to talk about the technique of your art, but ignorance prevents me sitting here and nodding sagely when you say "Yes, I use a Windsor and Newton #42 porcupine quill brush." Do you think you use the same tools as the majority of comic artists?*

BRIAN: I think the thing that makes me remarkable is that I don't use anything very special at all. When I was drawing LITTLE NYMPHO IN SLUMBERLAND all those years back, I was using a Rapidograph — which was the latest invention at the time, I suppose — but when I started drawing comics professionally, I really had to learn to use a brush. I now discover that a lot of people have worked with a crow quill pen, but I've never been able to push a pen around at all. I just can't stand the noise it makes on the paper. And the pen also just catches in the paper and goes "flick," and you get splashes of ink everywhere.

FRANK: *That's far from the conventional answer.*

BRIAN: During a formative period of my career, I was really intrigued and impressed by **Nestor Redondo's** artwork. He had a beautiful brush illustration technique that I thought was excellent, and I was trying to use a brush the way he did for a while. For a long time, I used the brush and nothing else, but the artists who used pen impress me at the moment. For instance, **Bill Sienkiewicz**, whose work is currently some

Plate from Bolland's portfolio for Editions Deesse.

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—whereas Batman represents justice."

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of the most exciting comic-book work around. It's great to see the vigor that somebody who uses a pen can put into the line. **Walt Simonson** scratches his way across the board and digs holes in it. There's a wonderful pleasure in looking at lines that are put on with abandon that you don't get from looking at these slow perfectionists like **Nestor Redondo.**

I find that nowadays my hand and my brush are busy doing one thing and my brain is screaming, "For God's sake, get a move on." I watch my hand doing these terribly slow-motion contoured lines which take forever to end, and I can actually quite dislike my own work — because in my mind I'd like to be working in a different way. I think I've pursued perfection at great expense in terms of the time taken to do the art.

FRANK: *I find one of the most appealing aspects of your artwork is that your faces are so expressive, something that's usually displayed in visual shorthand in comics.*

BRIAN: I can't remember exactly at what point I suddenly decided that gesture and facial expression were crucial, because — certainly in British comics — you get artists who are very good at drawing planes and tanks but their human characters are very disappointing. They're often very tiny figures who don't seem to come to the front because they're swamped by all the hardware in British comics. I'm still not very good at vehicles and that sort of thing — in fact, I based the spaceships in CAMELOT on some sheep's vertebrae that I had. I've got a little mirror that I used to prop up in front of my desk and grimace into. I've long since given up looking in the mirror, but I find that when I have to draw an angry face I have to grit my teeth and feel angry in order to do it. There was a period when I was actually using my own face and trying to change it to look like whatever character I was drawing. I did Black Canary in JLA #200 after she'd been bashed on the head, and she was feeling the bump on her head and frowning — and that was actually my face, minus the beard.

FRANK: *I remember that really stood out. Batman crouched in a tree looming over Black Canary in that story was great, as well. There was talk at one time about you doing a BATMAN graphic novel. In fact, there's been talk about lots of people doing a BATMAN graphic novel!*

BRIAN: Before the idea of Batman and Judge Dredd teaming came along, **Mike Barr** was suggesting that we do a BATMAN graphic novel together — but only very recently, I hear that everybody is doing BATMAN in some way or another and I think that little corner of the field is rather crowded.

THE CAROLINA COAST, OFF CAPE HATTERAS, IS MORE SWAMPLAND THAN SANDY BEACH, AND IN ITS DARK AND NOISOME REACHES, A MAN COULD WANDER LOST FOR DAYS WITHOUT SEEING THE SUN...
...A FACT THAT IS ONLY NOW BEGINNING TO IMPRESS ITSELF UPON A CERTAIN EMERALD ARCHER...
CHAPTER 6
GREEN ARROW
BLACK CANARY
vs.
BAT MAN
I'VE GOTTA BE CRAZY.
WHAT AM I DOING HERE?
TAGGING ALONG WAS YOUR IDEA, OLLIE.
YOU DIDN'T WANT ME FACING UP TO THE BATMAN ALONE--REMEMBER?
FAT CHANCE OF THAT NOW, PRETTY BIRD. WE'RE LOST.
WE'LL HAVE TROUBLE ENOUGH FINDING THE ROAD, NEVER MIND FINDING--
art: BRIAN BOLLAND * coloring: ADRIENNE ROY

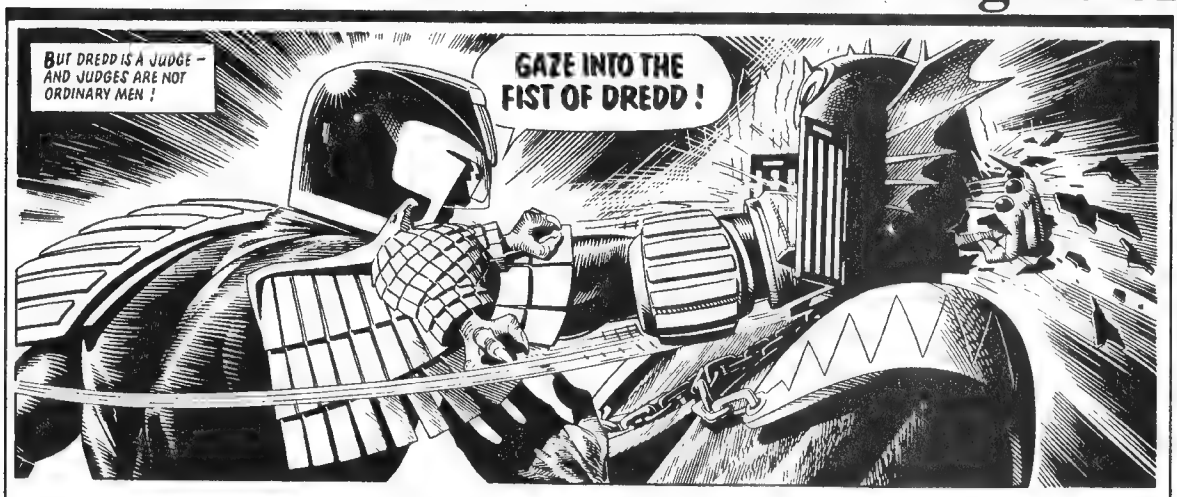
FRANK: *I noticed that a number of chickens crop up in your art. Why is that?*

BRIAN: I used to live with chickens and, in the case of the portfolio, it's that I've always been fascinated by humans with animal heads. When I was quite young, I remember seeing a copy of MY GREATEST ADVENTURE, drawn by **Nick Cardy**, I think. It was set in Egypt, and the people had animal heads.

There is something that goes right back to the *id* that tugs very sensitive strings in the back of your head when you see an animal-headed human being. There's a very good story about a woman who saw animal-headed people, and the animal head would relate to what the person was really like. These people would be quite nice to her, but deep down they were a snake, and so she saw the head of a snake, and gradually a conspiracy evolved around her and she could see that her husband had the head of a lion or some other predatory animal. Eventually, she went to the hospital and she was treated for it, and recovered to the point where she didn't see animal-headed people any more — but she looked at herself in the mirror and she had the head of a doe, head bowed, ready for the kill.

FRANK: *That's a nice irony. Totally unrelated to that... I feel that the artwork in comics has progressed a whole lot further than the writing, which is not much higher than the standard of the 1930s.*

"You can't deal with the same degree of



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BRIAN: When I first went over to working in America, I didn't really think there were many comics about that were worth reading — but while I was working on CAMELOT, lots of things cropped up that were really well-written. LOVE AND ROCKETS. AMERICAN FLAGG introduces a whole new way of writing and thinking about the comic story, but up until that point comics was an artist's medium to me.

In an interview that made a few enemies for him, for a while, **Joe Staton** said that he thought that comic-book writing was a third-rate artform but comic-book art was a first-rate artform. I think, at that time, we weren't actually shown otherwise. Comics inevitably have a trivializing effect. You can't deal with the same degree of human emotion and significance in comics as you can elsewhere.

FRANK: *I'd disagree. I think it can be done, but that no one's bothered to do it to any great extent.*

BRIAN: I think it would make very tedious comics.

FRANK: *No more than it makes for tedious books or films. Comics are drowning in a morass of superheroes at the moment. Even a book like AMERICAN FLAGG, that's well-written compared to most, revolves around what is a superhero, to all intents and purposes.*

BRIAN: I think the problem with anything is that you're stuck with *genre.* Comics are stuck with superheroes. In the case of television, you have to define what you're working in. . . it's either the cop drama or any of a number of other categorizable *genres.* It's very difficult to sell someting that's not recognizable.

FRANK: *LOVE AND ROCKETS transcends the* genre.

BRIAN: Yes, LOVE AND ROCKETS does transend that, but it's one exception. I really enjoy it. I love the people in it, I find them very attractive characters. We get the feeling that Rita Titanon was once someone wonderful and there's a feeling of great myth that goes back to the days when she was a wrestling star. I think they're so likeable. They're people — not characters, somehow.

FRANK: *So it can be done. All it needs is someone to lead the way. Everything else on the stands thrives on conflict.*

BRIAN: But as an artist I find there's a vigor about a drawing that depicts somebody knocking someone else's head in.

FRANK: *Don't you find that there's only so many ways you can do a fight scene before it becomes exceptionally contrived — on JUDGE DREDD, for instance?*

BRIAN: Oddly enough, looking through all the episodes of JUDGE DREDD I drew, I can't remember more than two fight scenes. Dredd poses a lot, standing with his gun up. There was one occasion where he puts his fist through Judge Fear's helmet, and that was probably my finest hour — but you can't live on your memories.

There isn't much fighting in DREDD. Certainly, people don't get knocked through walls.

FRANK: *But there is violence and the suspect morality.*

BRIAN: I'm absolutely against the idea that's been propagated in comics that there is such a thing as good guys and bad guys. I think it's a dangerous concept that "we are the good guys and they are the bad guys," it's a frightening attitude. That's why I liked Judge Dredd. He wasn't the good guy and everybody else the bad guys. I would hope the reader was watching a confrontation between two extreme approaches. I would expect the readers to have that level of sophistication, but maybe they don't.

FRANK: *I would think that comics would have changed by now, if they did.*

BRIAN: One thing I would love to do is a comic about a whole set of characters who are set in a kind of modern world, who — instead of slugging it out and knocking people through walls — actually operate through international intrigue. Through deals and trade with other countries and all the ways in which the supposed good guys and bad guys of this world struggle with one another. I'd show them in such a way that you saw that each one of them was playing the same game that all the protagonists in our world are playing.

FRANK: *The post-Watergate American society pushed comics in that direction for a short while.*

BRIAN: At the moment, though, there's the 400 group (or something like that) who're a born again Christian fundamental group who're attacking comics because they contain pentagrams and Satanic symbols. I can see people attacking comics because they're too gruesome and violent — but to attack comics because some of the heroes derive their power from magic and pentagrams is ridiculous. In fact, what this group actually said was that it leads children into superstition. From my extremely prejudiced position, I view religion as superstition, but that wouldn't stand up in court.

FRANK: *But no one could prove the existence of God in court, either. I haven't seen the topic of fan admiration dealt with in any interview yet.*

BRIAN: It's all very confusing and very weird, because when you're with comic-book people you can get this curious impression that the field in which you're working is so incredibly important. One can feel an enormously important star, and that's ludicrous — because all we're doing is knocking out funnybooks. But while it is ludicrous, you can't forget that the professional freelancers are very important assets to

human emotion in comics as elsewhere."

"I could do a pretty nifty BATMAN."

IN THE LAB OF THE UNBELIEVABLY EVIL DOC FRANKENHEIM, THE INCREDIBLY UGLY ASSISTANT, YGOR, CONFRONTS HIS NEW SELF, AFTER A DISASTROUS EXPERIMENT.
:SNIFF: MASHTER, YGOR HAS A GRIZZLY VISAGE!

Panels from "Walter the Wobot -- Fwiend of Dwedd."

the companies. We're sufficiently important to them to pay us thousands of dollars.

FRANK: *Is your art influenced by the cinema at all?*

BRIAN: I've always liked the *avant garde.* There's a Russian film director, **Tarkovsky**, whose films I think are great.

FRANK: *Didn't he produce a three-hour space film?*

BRIAN: That's SOLARIS, which was long winded, but that's the way he makes films. **Tarkovsky** made a film called THE STALKER which is excellent stuff, and filmed in this muted rusty-green color. You have this depressing, dripping, mossy gren effect all the time, and his films are so slow that sometimes you think that the film has stopped. *(Laughter.)*

In STALKER the idea is that three men, called The Professor, The Writer and The Stalker, go into the Zone — which is a region they feel they have to get into because it's forbidden and guarded. Something caused this Zone, but we don't know what it was. In the middle of the Zone is the Room, and in this room your dreams come true. The three spend most of the film getting into the Zone, crossing the Zone, and getting into the room. The story doesn't really matter, because the film is all about their striving to get into this central area and the marvelous imagery that's used. I find that, even with all the millions of dollars of special effects that **Spielberg** uses, this chap can create magic on the screen that I find takes my breath away. There's a scene of a girl sitting with her head on a table, and she's looking at a glass. You watch her for about five minutes as she's lying there watching the glass.

FRANK: *I don't think that I'd be watching for five minutes.*

BRIAN: Ah, but then the glass moves across the table and you're not told how. Presumably, the girl made it move. Finally, when the three get to the room in the center of the Zone, they're on the outside of the room looking in. We're in the room, and we sit there looking out at them looking in, for ages. And it rains inside the room. You look through the rain in the room at them looking in, and this scene goes on for so long — but in a way this is the most extraordinarily magical thing you've ever seen.

FRANK: *You get stoned first.*

BRIAN: Maybe I should try that!

FRANK: *I read a great letter in a fanzine once, in which a guy wrote that his friend thought that Jack Kirby's BLACK PANTHER was the best comic he'd read — but what he used to do was get stoned before he read it.*

BRIAN: Because **Tarkovsky** uses minimalism, there are long periods where not much is going on. Something almost insignificant can happen in the corner of the picture that will knock you back into your seat, when you're just about ready to leave. There's another long slow scene in a room in the dark and it's raining outside — he uses the rain a lot — and you're watching this black shape in the middle of a room, which is a man lying asleep on a bed. You see a leaf being washed down the outside of the windowpane and, apart from the rain, that's the only thing moving in the whole frame. The moving leaf becomes absolutely fascinating, but after a while a black dog walks out of a lit room at one side, and because it's black you can only just see it. It's like looking at a **Trevor Von Eeden** page. The dog is almost like a demon or the devil himself walking out of the kitchen, because it's just this black shape with pointed ears and bright eyes walking out of the light into darkness.

FRANK: *I don't think I'd have the patience to sit and watch that.*

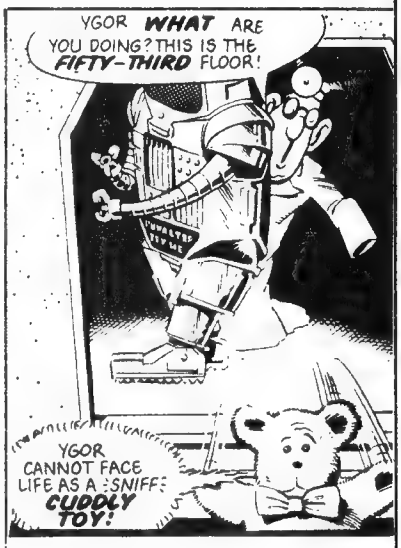
BRIAN: For years I've enjoyed the artwork in comics without being interested in the story. Likewise, I can be seduced by the richness of the visual image in these films without the constraints of plot.

FRANK: *It's probably quite true that I can't.*

BRIAN: There's just a feeling of danger and magic in **Tarkovsky's** films, that millions of dollars of special effects can't create for me. We all know how they're done, and there's no mystery at all.

FRANK: *The batteries are running out here* (pointing to tape recorder), *is there anything else you want to see in print?*

BRIAN: I suppose I should put in a quick plug for the work I'm doing at the moment.



The DREDD Eagle covers seem to be taking a lot of my time. The Fink Bros., who are a famous pop group recording under an assumed name, they're really *(mumble mumble)*, are bringing out a record about Judge Dredd called "Muties in Mega-City" and I'm doing the sleeve. There's the six prints for Editions Deesse. There's a "Munden's Bar" story for First's GRIMJACK, which is pencilled in a drawer somewhere. I'm dropping in at DC soon, and I hope we'll be working out what I'll be doing for them next. I'm keen to do a good female character of some sort. At some stage, I intend to have a stab at writing and drawing something — there are a bunch of characters in the Old Testament that I've taken a fancy to... No, I haven't been born again! And then there's Batman. I still think I could do a pretty nifty Batman. So who knows.

THE VEWY, VEWY END!

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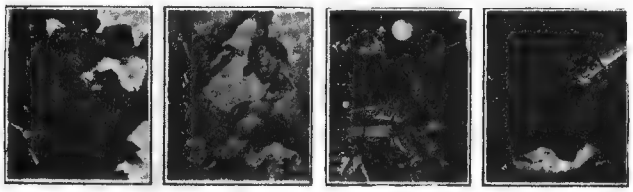

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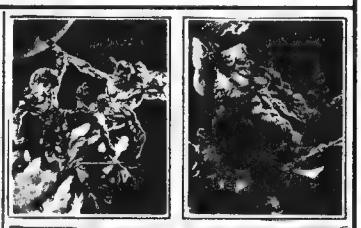

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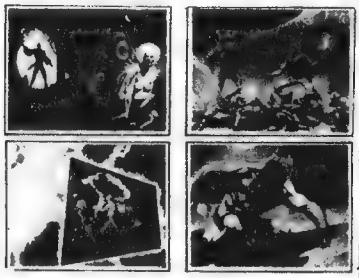

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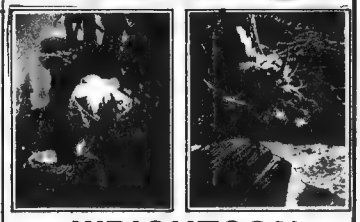

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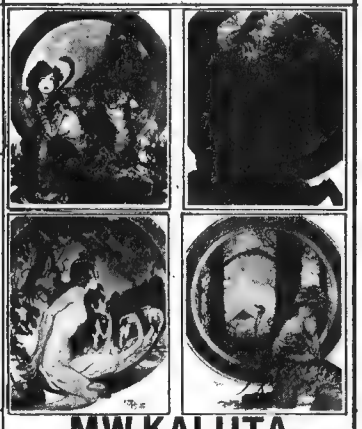

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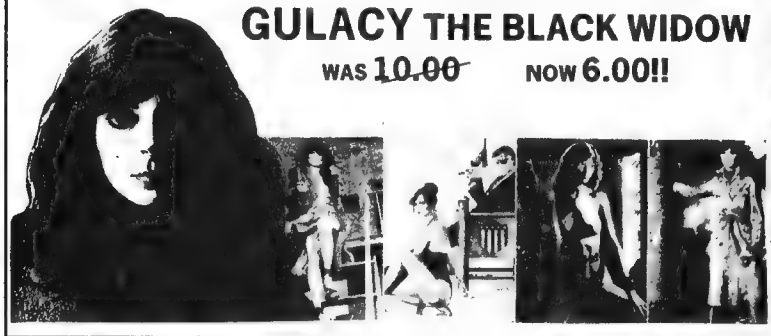

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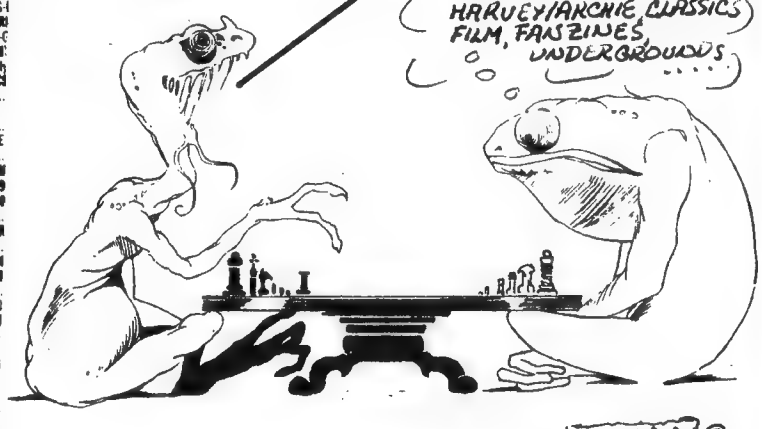

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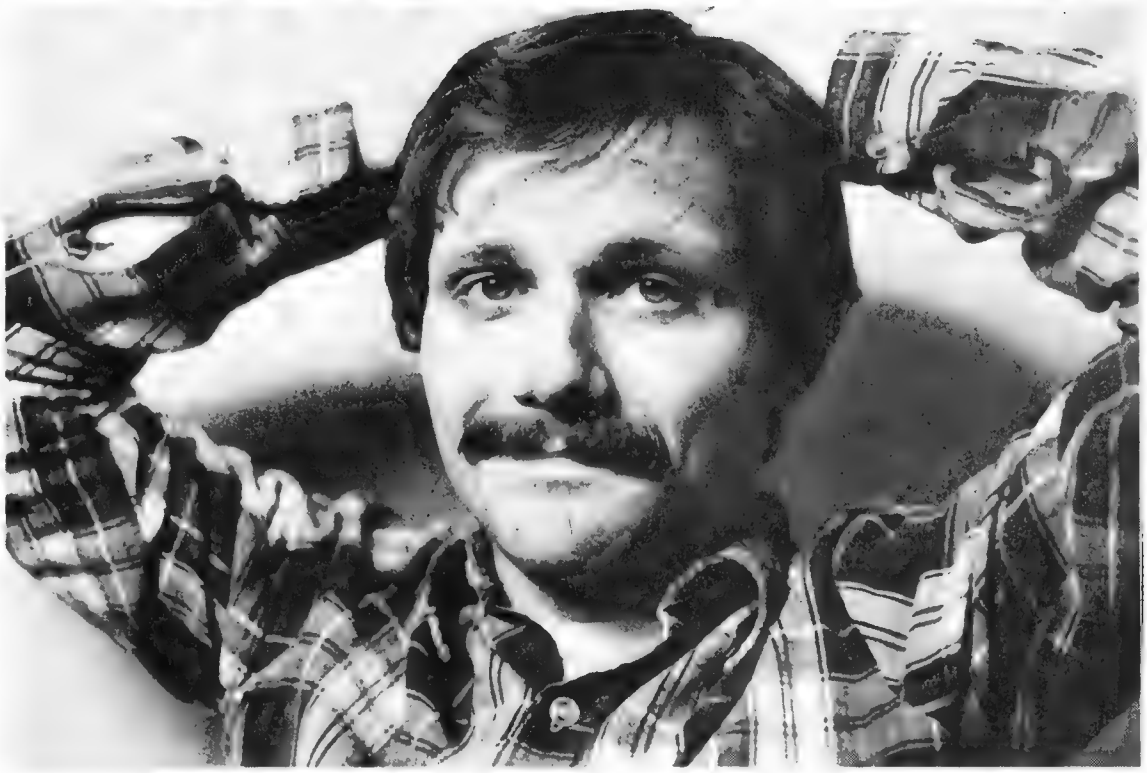
"Some people literally refuse to read ZOT!"

SCOTT McCLOUD



In part one Scott, the artist of Eclipse Comics' ZOT! discussed everything from AMERICAN FLAGG to THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON to the Japanese comics Frank Miller hasn't seen to ZOT!'s theme of hope and disillusionment.

Here in part two, Scott holds forth on the origins of ZOT! in the four Jungian archetypes... Warner Bros. cartoons... the artist as auteur... why so few women read comics... Wendy Pini's hidden strength... and more, with Jim Salicrup and Kurt Busiek joining forces to badger him.

JIM SALICRUP: *Tell us about how you came to create Zot — his secret origins, as it were. Where'd the character come from?*

SCOTT McCLOUD: Zot came out of my looking at a huge collection of old **Dick Calkins'** BUCK ROGERS, which I didn't like all that much, but I liked certain things about them. I wanted to see if I could distill those qualities and begin to build on that, just those elements that I liked. This fascination with things, gadgets. I don't think ZOT! has much to do with those **Calkins** strips now, but that's where Zot himself came from, from a sketch I did based on that, and then he evolved from there. Coming up with characters is like second nature with me. That's almost the best part, just coming up with new people to put in the book. So I looked for characters that would go well with him and the environment until I had what I thought were the four main characters. It's really five at this point. Uncle Max is as much a member of the main cast as the others. But Zot, Jenny, Peabody and Butch, I created to be the continuing cast, and they stayed that way. Peabody was created specifically for Butch, as counterpoint to — oh boy, should I get into **Jung** now, I may be going too far.

JIM: *Get into it.*

SCOTT: Okay, I'll get into **Jung**.

KURT BUSIEK: Go for it.

SCOTT: I know almost nothing about **Carl Jung**, the psychologist, except what I got from a tiny little primer. Somebody had condensed all of **Jung**'s theories into something that would fit into READER'S DIGEST without breaking the seams. But I learned

"People seem to have this idea that

some important things from it, and from an animation teacher who liked **Jung**'s ideas. One thing I learned was that **Jung** separated most human thought, most personalities, into four basic groups: thought, feeling, sensation and intuition. And Zot, Jenny, Peabody and Butch were determined by those four. I chose to make each of them rely on one of the four and, by doing so, I gave myself an anchor that had nothing to do with speech patterns or costumes or whatever. It just suggested to me what type of approach they would take to any situation, what their unique perspective would be. I've since found out that a lot of other comic-book writers, moviemakers, playwrights and whatnot, have taken this attitude of finding a sort of conceptual skeleton for their characters. **Wendy Pini** based some of hers on animals. Cutter on a rooster, Leeta on a cat, I believe, and Rayek on a snake. She didn't make it a point that they *had* to act with the characteristics of these animals, it just gave her a core to build on. That sort of characterization, I think, has always been very successful because people who read works where that's done — they sense it. They sense that there's something about this character that really holds him together, something that can't be explained by just the fact that he talks in a certain way or has this power and that power. A character has got to be more than a collection of characteristics, and that's what I've been trying, not always successfully, to do. Now most of my characters are archetypes, not stereotypes, I hope. They are based on some idea or some character in mythology, or some force. When you have characters like that, their interaction, what happens when they *meet*, gives you the opportunity to deal with all sorts of subtle ideas. They're like primary colors. Every color in the rainbow can be created form three primary colors, and I think that all of the subtleties of human experience can be described in literature — it sounds so snotty, but it's true, damn it! — *(laughter)* — through the interaction of just a dozen or so basic forces, forces like death, like that father figure, the "old wise man" that **Jung** identified. These archetypes who keep coming back again and again and again, no matter what the story. Even if you try not to write characters like that, your readers will *still* tend to plug in these archetypes wherever they can. Some old guy with a beard who's smart will become a father figure in the reader's mind, and all you can do is weaken that. You can't deny it, because all audiences have this common instinct. They always have, always will. In fact, another wonderful thing about **Tezuka** is that he seems to be aware of this way characters keep reoccurring. Because in **Tezuka**'s comics, he actually brings back the *same characters*, as if they were actors. He'll have some science-fiction tale, and he'll have his wise old man come in and do his bit, but then he'll do something that happened thousands of years before, and it'll be the same character, same one.

JIM: *Like the Warner cartoons.*

SCOTT: *(Laughter.)* Okay, thanks. Burst my balloon. Go ahead.

KURT: Or the Disney characters. Mickey Mouse in MICKEY AND THE BEANSTALK.

Jenny Weaver, a 13yearold Earth Girl who is swept away to Zot's world.

JIM: *I always wanted them to do that with the Marvel characters, who are so stuck in continuity...*

SCOTT: Yeah, yeah. You see that sort of thing in cartoons... No, really, I think that **Tezuka** is much more aware of it. He even gives them the same name — all right, I know, Bugs Bunny had the same name, too.

JIM: *Warner Bros. had more freedom of characters, like movie stars.*

SCOTT: Yeah. Exactly. But the archetypes really are the great actors. They've played in just about every worthwhile story since we started telling stories. These characters have always been there, because we are born with an idea of who these people are. So I'm more than happy to write them as they were meant to be written and not dilute them a whole lot. And I still think there's a lot of subtle characterization you can do with these fairly basic characters. **Bert Hernandez** does that sort of thing in the first "Heartbreak Soup," which is maybe my favorite comic-book story in the last ten years or so... American comic.

JIM: *Well, to take it from a different direction, for someone who's never read ZOT!, who's just read this interview up to now, this is a lot of cerebral stuff, and yet a lot of people see ZOT! as just a very fun, enjoyable comic. How would you describe it?*

SCOTT: Fun? Enjoyable? Nyaahhh! They get everything wrong! *(Laughter.)*No, those who think that ZOT! is supposed to be fun and enjoyable are right on the mark, I hope. Those who read it obviously know what it's like, and know that it *is* fun and enjoyable and, I hope, stimulating — oh God, I hate words llike that. Scratch that — not stimulating. *(Laughter.)* "Something more," okay? It's something more than just that. There's been a lot of discussion as to why some people literally refuse to read ZOT!, and resent the fact that it's even on the stands when they see those cartoony smiling faces. They assume it's just a kiddy book.

JIM: *Maybe you should call it ZOT THE DESTROYER.* (Laughter.)

SCOTT: Yeah, I think that calling it ZOT! sounds too cartoony and silly. We ought to call it something serious, like THE SWAMP THING. *(Laughter.)* Obviously, everyone loves **Moore** and **Bissette**'s work because it has a serious, profound title like THE SWAMP THING. Seriously, though, it's a little frustrating that so many people seem to have this idea that ZOT! is just for kids. It isn't. I'm writing it for myself. I ain't a kid. I'm writing it for my editors as an audience, and they aren't kids. I'm writing it for my grandfather for heaven's sake, he ain't a kid. Many adults enjoy ZOT! and not at all in a patronizing, condescending way. They enjoy it as something that speaks to

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ZOT! is just for kids. It isn't."

them *directly*. I'm writing for adults as much as I'm writing for kids. Kids can read ZOT! and understand it, but there's plenty in it for adults also. They aren't always the same thing. The things in ZOT! that adults enjoy aren't always the same things that the kids enjoy, although sometimes they are. There are a lot of things that I hope will appeal to both. I guess a lot of the more adult material happens between the lines. The things that we can infer about the characters, the psychological insights we might have into them, especially with characters that are this iconic. There's also a lot of speculation and a lot of what goes on in ZOT! doesn't go on in the book at all, it goes on in the reader's mind, while he's reading it. That's true of any comic, but it's especially true in ZOT! The things that you wonder about, the lingering mysteries, some of which may never be solved, are part of what goes on in ZOT!

JIM: *Which mystery will never be solved?*

KURT: What's behind the door? *(Laughter.)*

SCOTT: Nobody knows what's behind the door except for me, but that is one mystery that *will* be solved, at least for the readers.

JIM: *Well, Kurt knows what's on Jay's trays.*

KURT: Jay's trays?

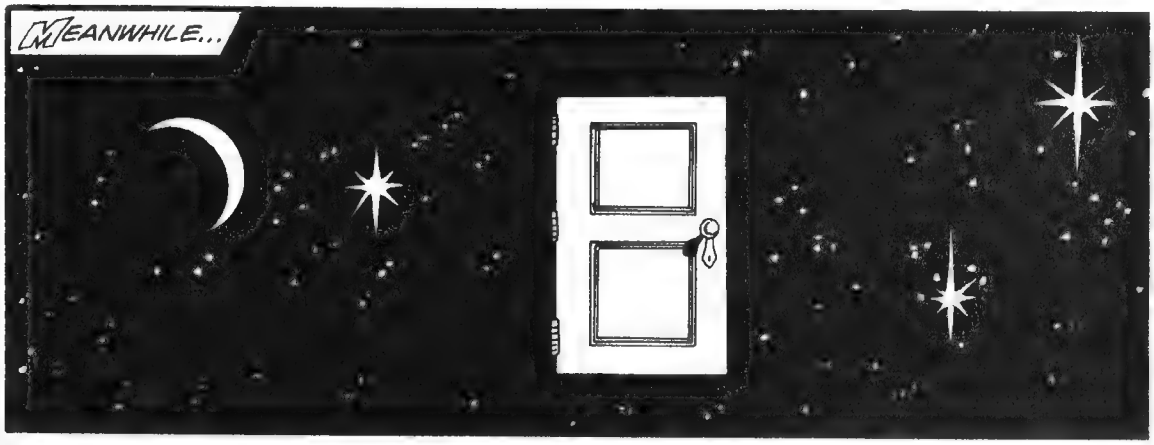
JIM: *You have to watch LET'S MAKE A DEAL.*

SCOTT: What's behind door number two?

KURT: I want the box behind where **Carol Merrill** is standing.

SCOTT: "The Door" mystery will be solved in issue #8. But some other mysteries will never be solved.

The enigmatic "Doorway at the Edge of the Universe."



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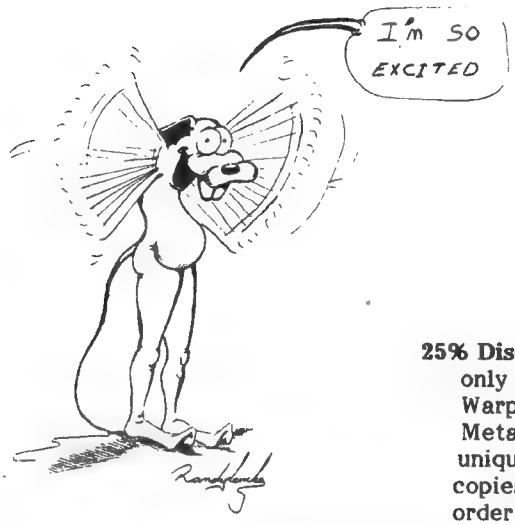

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"The lingering mysteries are part of ZOT!"

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JIM: *Now which mysteries are those? Or will that remain a mystery also?*
KURT: We'll never solve that.
SCOTT: For now, at least...
JIM: *Well, I also wanted to talk about creator's rights, and creator ownership. How do you feel about all those?*
SCOTT: Well, I suppose it's no big deal, as far as ethics go. Anything you sign your name to, well, that's your business. We've all got to make our own decisions. But I do think it's a healthy state that the industry is in, or is going to be in soon, where somebody who decides to create a whole world, a whole cast of characters, will do so with the knowledge that when he's done with that, it's still his. He's not going to give it to anyone. He's only going to give them the works that *incorporate* those ideas. And this may result, in the short term, in some loss on the company's part, but in the long term, I think the whole industry should be richer for it.
JIM: *Well, no company has lost...*
SCOTT: Well, one could say that, you know, if ZOT! did hit, for instance, and I went somewhere else for some reason, that Eclipse would have lost out on the merchandising opportunities, or something. That's not too likely to happen any time soon. My only point, and it's been made before, it's nothing new, is that if what you make is going to stay in your pocket, then you're going to make it worth more. You're not going to do a shoddy job and palm it off on somebody, because *you're* the one who's stuck with it, and you might as well make it *worth* keeping.
JIM: *In a related question, Kurt was telling me that you tend to feel that creators themselves should do both the writing and the artwork, where possible.*
SCOTT: Well, I don't want to sound like, like, like... *(laughter)* No, I don't want to sound too dogmatic about the writer-artist thing. It's a preference of mine. It's probably one of the reasons why I enjoy almost the whole Aardvark-Vanaheim line is because each of those books are the work of one individual. But I do think there are some real advantages to that, that go beyond just personal preference. You can still do a great comic book with a separate writer and artist, especially when the artist takes the attitude that he's going to tell the story as well as possible. But, damn it, it's just more *interesting* when you can read a comic book and know that this is a vision that one person is laying down, because he wanted to, because it was important that he wanted to put this on paper, he wanted you to read it, and not just that he wanted to prove that he was a dynamite scripter, or whatever.
JIM: *Well, I agree with that in principle, but I think it can be done with more than one person. You don't letter ZOT!...*
SCOTT: Well, certain jobs can be handed out easier than others. And yet, sometimes I wish I *did* letter ZOT!, even though **Bob Lappan** is one of the best letterers I could have had. Sometimes I do regret that it's not in front of me at all times.
JIM: *Well, I think also — you didn't do the logo.*
SCOTT: I did.
JIM: *Okay. (Laughter.)*
SCOTT: I hope that doesn't debunk your whole theory.
JIM: *I thought I read a credit that someone else did it.*
SCOTT: I designed the logo and **Todd Klein** did the final version.
JIM: *That's what I meant.*
SCOTT: But his final version is very close to my design. I just needed someone with the skill to execute it, and enough judgement to make modifications where necessary.
JIM: *Yes, I've designed lots of logos, but I've never done the actual mechanicals.*
SCOTT: Todd did some things, like make the exclamation point flush with the top of the T. Italicized it more, things like that.

The monstrous robot known as Zybox -- slated to appear in issue thirteen.

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"Kirby is always going to be an enigma."

© 1985 Osamu Tezuka

JIM: *No, what I meant was that even though you don't handle every detail, you did design the series, based on your view of things, like in the SPIRIT by Will Eisner, where Will was just the force behind it.*

SCOTT: We're talking about the question of the *auteur,* which is very important in filmmaking especially, where it's *got* to be a collaborative medium. Just the other night I heard an interview with a director who said that even in his best films, he could never count on more than 20 per cent of what he wanted to be there. That's because film is, by it's very nature, a collaborative medium. But comics are different. And I think that's one of our most important advantages, and an advantage which we're not exploiting, half as much as we might. But the situation is improving.

JIM: *As you said, there are more people doing it themselves.*

SCOTT: It is happening more and more. We'll have to wait and see how far it goes. I hope it goes a lot further. I mean, can anybody deny that AMERICAN FLAGG is the most worthwhile comic **Howard Chaykin** has done? Well, yes, somebody probably will, as soon as they read this. I think it is, anyway.

JIM: *But then, we just had two issues that he didn't even draw.*

SCOTT: I think those were necessary, for him to get a vacation. They were essentially fill-ins.

JIM: *He could have had two issues of THE BEST OF HOWARD CHAYKIN. (Laughter.)*

SCOTT: Anyway, I sometimes get pegged by my friends, and rightfully so, as a bit of a fanatic on this, the whole writer-artist thing. Not everyone is so attached to the idea.

JIM: *Well, for example, even though I like Kirby and Ditko's work by themselves, I still prefer everything they've done with Stan Lee.*

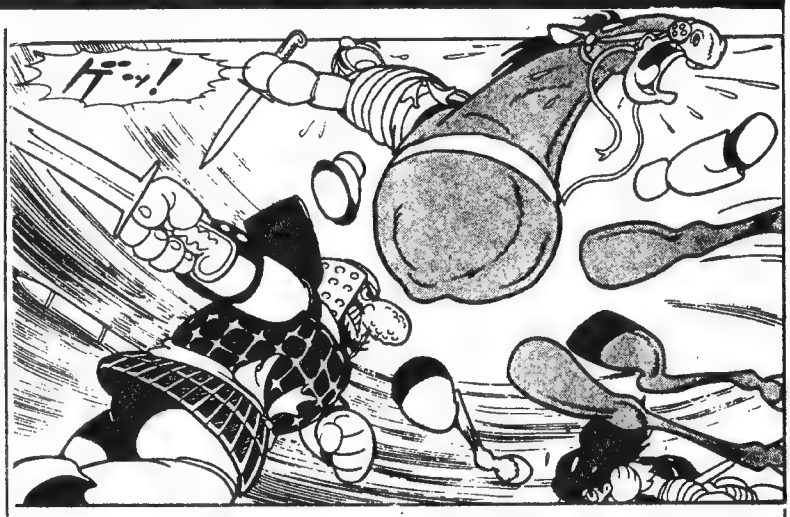
SCOTT: The question of **Kirby**: **Kirby** is always going to be an enigma for me because we're so surrounded by **Kirby**. It's hard to understand someone whose work you're exposed to in one form or another nearly everyday. Even if you've never read a **Kirby** comic, you're constantly reading **Kirby** *influenced* comics, and very few people pay attention to that. Only an outsider will look at **Keith Pollard** and say, oh I see, this is in the **Jack Kirby** tradition. Not **Buscema — Kirby**.

JIM: *Well, I noticed that even with ZOT!, Kurt is given credit.*

SCOTT: As a consultant.

JIM: *Exactly what does he do?*

SCOTT: Well, I see what you're getting at. You're saying that collaborators have an important role, right?



From Osamu Tezuka's 2000-plus page PHOENIX.

JIM: *I'm just saying that, like, you mentioned GROO, also. That has Mark Evanier.*

SCOTT: But is there any question in anyone's mind — including Mark's — who the author, the creative mind behind GROO is?

JIM: *Well, if you listen to Kirby, he was doing everything, anyway, and Stan may have just been giving him better dialogue, acting as an editor, a consultant...*

SCOTT: It's quite possible that **Stan Lee** was essentially an assistant to **Jack Kirby**; despite Stan's huge input, Jack was the artist — the "author" of the Marvel Age, really. He's the name to know, and even though it seems like we've gone far afield of **Kirby**, we really haven't. Hell, neither have I, and I freely admit that. Kirby's one of my top three influences, with **Tezuka** and **Herge.**

JIM: *We were going to talk about mini-comics, also.*

SCOTT: Yeah, let's talk about mini-comics!

JIM: *You did a couple of mini-comics?*

SCOTT: I did a couple of mini-comics, and boy, was it fun! Everybody should do mini-comics. **Howard Chaykin** should do mini-comics! **Art Spiegleman** — well, he probably already has. MAUS. Everybody should do mini-comics. Really. I swear. Take up four hours some night. Do a mini-comic. I don't care if you've never done a comic

From ZOT! 5, guest-starring Fred Flintstone -- sort of.

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"If we screw up and lose civilization,

in your life, you can do a mini-comic. There's lots of things that interest me about mini-comics. I get **Clay Geerdes'** mini-comics every few weeks, and they're a lot of fun. But the main reason that mini-comics are so exciting to me is that they're so easy to do, to publish, in terms of actually constructing the thing, getting them printed up and all. They're in such a simple format that fans could be doing mini-comics all the time. It would just be so exciting — if instead of spending all their time buying the "right" bristol board, and technical pen sets, and practicing their thigh muscles, and trying to learn how **John Byrne** designs costumes — if instead they just started making comics and giving them to friends, giving them to people who had nothing to do with comics, doing them about their own lives, about things that happen to them every day that their audience — meaning their friends — has some reference for. And the result of this —

JIM: *Would be a lot of mini-comics.*

SCOTT: Would be a lot of mini-comics! And people would start to develop their own way of telling a story, their own styles would evolve, just naturally, out of necessity. And suddenly there'd be so many more diverse styles than we have now, where everyone who thinks about breaking into comics thinks in terms of breaking into Marvel first, DC second, First third and so on. One important phenomenon I noticed when I was a kid, growing up with **The Legendary Brian Dewan** and **Kurt Busiek** here, was that if you just start doing comics, and giving them to friends, then those friends, if they have any creativity at all, will be tempted to do the same. And it won't matter that they can't draw a man to look like anything other than a cucumber, it doesn't matter, because it's all among friends, and you're trying to communicate to that limited audience. Besides, you get the full range of experience by actually printing your comic books. You get everything, from the writing to the art to the lettering to the printing, even to the selling, in some cases, and most of all to the *reader reaction,* which is where it all happens! And which so few fan-artists ever really get. They get their friends' reactions to how their leg-muscles are coming along, or whether they should use a thinner pen for the panel borders, but they very seldom are able to hand some friend or relative a finished comic and say, "Here, read this. Tell me what you think. Tell me how it affects you." It all sounds like a real pipe dream, but I think we're ready for some kind of reaction to the over emphasis on technique that really brutalized comics in the late Seventies. Eventually, we're going to see a very strong movement away from that to a concern with story and with content. It's beginning to happen now. I think ELFQUEST was an important step in that for many reasons, one of them being Wendy's and Richard's determination to do it by themselves and make it work. Also the fact that it ain't super-heroes, and that the story was important to so many people *as* a story. Obviously, there've been a lot of other good developments, but ELFQUEST was the most visible success. One of the most successful.

JIM: *I think ZOT! will be also.*

SCOTT: Thanks for the plug!

JIM: *Now give me my $10 sketch. (Laughter.)*

SCOTT: I'd like to think it can be. Obviously we have a ways to go. But we're getting a lot of good signs that Zot's potential audience may be pretty big. Obviously, I'm biased as hell, so I may not be the one to ask about this, but the type of reactions we're getting are the sort of things that ELFQUEST got at the beginning. For one thing, a lot of people who never read comics at all like ZOT!, and that's a good sign. That means we're not depending on acquired tastes, but on more basic instincts. Also, people are talking a lot about the characters and the story, and not approaching it in a distant, analytical way. They're getting into what they're reading, and not just how it's presented, which is certainly what I wanted to happen. Our very first printed letter, a letter by **S. A. Bennett**, remarks on how he felt as if he had always known these

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ZOT! will have been my swansong."

characters and he couldn't wait to meet them. That comment really is indicative of the power of archetypes, that you recognize them in a very real sense, even though you've never seen them before, and they already have a meaning. Sometimes it's very dangerous; if used the wrong way, they can be very manipulative. But I'll try to use them responsibly, if this thing really does catch on.

JIM: *Well, suppose it does, in the extreme. Becomes bigger than Smurfs.*

SCOTT: Oh, no!

JIM: *Suppose they wanted to do a ZOT! cartoon, a ZOT! comic strip...*

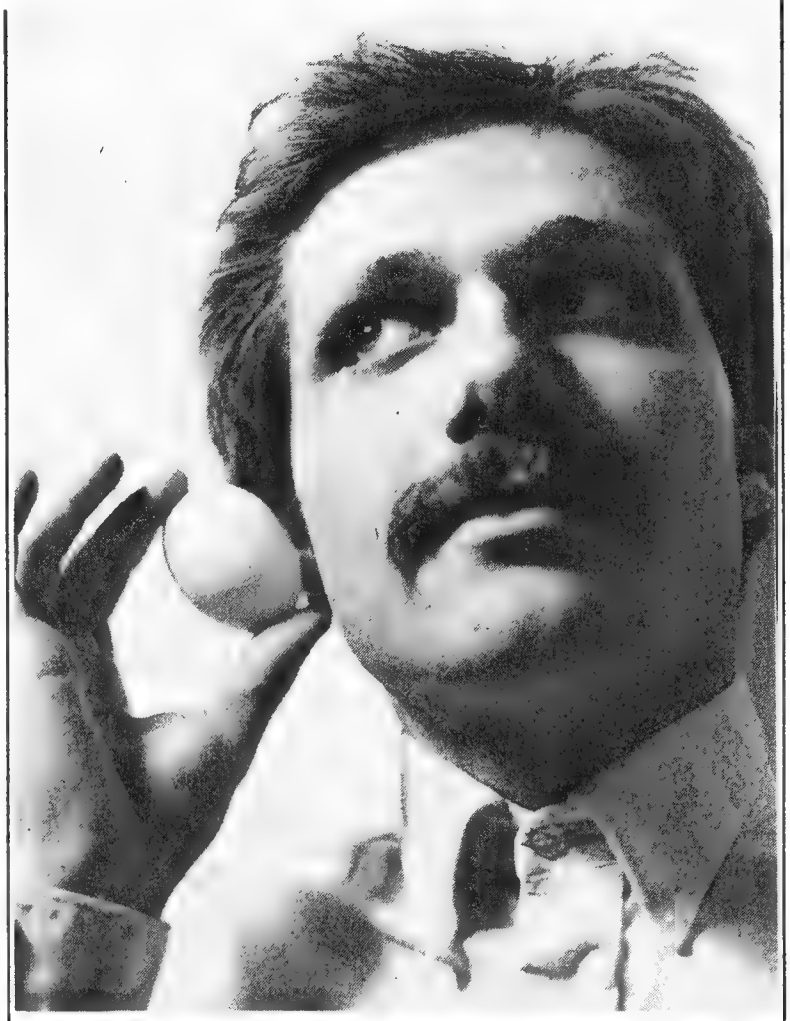
SCOTT: Actually, CBS Toys already contacted me, though later they decided it isn't what they're looking for just now. But I think it wouldn't hurt if it was already a hit, to make toys out of it. I would take more-or-less the same attitude about merchandizing that I did with ZOT! itself — that is, if I could have enough control to make sure the thing wasn't going to come out as crap, then I might do it. I think **Mark Evanier**'s already been in that position several times, being offered adaptations of his characters — specifically, the DNAGENTS — and he's been waiting for a situation where he can get it done right. Wendy and Richard went through that, are still going through that. It's not easy to have that great amount of control. There's some give and take.

JIM: *Other people would be involved in drawing and writing...*

SCOTT: Sure, but it depends. Even in an animation studio, somebody has to guide it, creatively. It'd just need to be the right person. That's one problem I'm not going to worry about too soon.

JIM: *Well, a couple more years.*

SCOTT: I should add: One of the reasons I felt, when I designed ZOT!, that it would eventually be a hit, is that in any medium, the most successful works all have a very strong emphasis on that certain type of characterization which emphasizes somewhat broad types and very often archetypes. Lots of people have gone through and analyzed things like the WIZARD OF OZ for its implied meanings, and you can do this to most of those stories. I've tried to keep that in ZOT! Something that doesn't change with cultures, or political climates, or anything like that. Because no matter what the medium is, people want to read about people. By the way, I think that if we had more stories about *people* in comics, it's been demonstrated that we probably wouldn't have so few women reading comics. It always sounds sexist, but really, advertisers know it, and psychologists know it — it's just the hard facts of life. If your people are just cardboard cut-outs, your female readership is going to be zilch.



Which came first -- ? Scott ponders the eternal enigma.

JIM: *Guys are dumb. (Laughter.)*

SCOTT: Awe, skip it. That whole paragraph is just a bust. *(Mysterious 15 second gap.)*

KURT: Well, yeah, it's like, gee...

SCOTT: **Kurt Busiek** really is my consultant.

KURT: Yeah, but what is it that I do?

SCOTT: Well, **Kurt Busiek** and **Adam Phillips** are listed as consultants and they're basically editors with no power. They're feeble editors. I send ZOT! in all it's various stages to Kurt and Adam, just as I send it to Cat and Dean, and I get input from all four of them. And basically, I solicit as many comments and as much feedback as I can about ZOT!, because I want to make sure I know how my audience is going to react to it. But once that's done, it's up to me to decide which approach I'm going to take. Within limits. Basically, it's just very helpful to have a lot of people looking at your comic before it goes to print.

JIM: *In issue #6, what kind of a role did your consultants play?*

KURT: In issue#6, what did I do?

SCOTT: Yeah, what *did* you do? Well, just as a random example, **Adam Phillips** pointed out that in my last page, in the layout, I had certain figures on the right hand side which gave the ending of the story a very abrupt feeling, and I wound up reversing the layout of the entire page — right through all of the previous panels, as well — just to get that beat on the left-hand side in the last panel, so that there would be more of, I guess, a reverberation of the scene. It's strange — these are things that are difficult to notice when you're as close to the comic as I am, but somebody on the outside, who's

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"ZOT! has a very serious side."

just seeing it for the first time, can point them out easily. This sort of thing is happening all the time. Kurt is probably the most vicious at it, though.

KURT: *(Growls.)*

SCOTT: Because I've known him longer than anybody else and he can just say, this whole scene stinks, do it again. Cat and Dean have to be a little more tactful, because their word carries a special weight. They are my editors, after all, and I can't just go and say,"Ah, forget you."

KURT: A lot of what Adam and I do is just, like, if a character says, "Ah, it is nice that it is cool and dark and no longer hot," we tell Scott, nobody would ever say that! Or, you know, this guy's arm is bent so far back to his back that his shoulder would be broken, draw me a man whose shoulder isn't broken. When it gets down to actually looking at the pencilled pages, we do art corrections and a few dialogue corrections. Scott will describe the whole plot to us over the telephone and we might suggest, well, this particular surprise that you've got on page three, put it on page 20, and build it — having the surprise build up, because you know these people are reacting to something and they don't know what it is until you finally get the payoff.

SCOTT: Basically, we discuss the plots, we discuss the layouts, we discuss the pencils, and we discuss the inks. That's four stages. I use up a lot of Express Mail.

JIM: *Well, in #6 issue, a major character dies.*

KURT: Can I ask you a real leading question? You said you were doing ZOT! for adults, that ZOT! is a helpful, happy book and you have a main character that's dying. Would you care to comment on that?

SCOTT: Well, Jim . . . *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *I* also *hired Kurt as assistant.*

SCOTT: Issue #6 may do what issue #4 did for a lot of people —

JIM: *What* did *issue #4 do?*

SCOTT: That is to convince —

KURT: — people to stop buying the comic.

SCOTT: *(Sighs.)* And that is to convince my readership that ZOT! has a very serious side which isn't just incidental, not something that just comes in once in a while, to offset all the light moments. I hope when I'm done you will have seen some pathos, some comedy, some tragedy, a lot of mystery, just about everything under the sun. The death of Drufus — which I hope was unexpected, because he was really a pretty comical character up to that point — is a good example of how I'd like to see those mixed, because that's the way life is, really. Comedy and tragedy don't always wait for their turn. Sometimes, they come up right against each other. Sometimes, they

overlap. And I think that's something that most of the writers and artists that I like have always understood. One of the nicest things about THE SPIRIT is that it always had a lighter side and a serious side, and they didn't have to be relegated to different bookshelves, they were all part of the same work. It was very funny and it was very serious. And very often it was both at the same time. **Shakespeare** was the same way, **Disney** was the same way. Any worthwhile work has that diversity of moods. If you were laughing on page 12, and something really tragic happens on page 14, you're more likely to be affected by it, because you've come that much further down. Does that make sense?

JIM: *Like the old movie trailers, "You'll laugh, you'll cry. . ."*

KURT: You'll kiss four bucks goodbye! *(Laughter.)* Here's a question: How does such a hopeful and positive hero like Zot come from such a miserable background?

SCOTT: Well, Jim . . . *(Laughter.)* I think that happens in real life. I'm sure a lot of the great up-beat heroes really did come from miserable backgrounds. I think we'd find quite a few if we actually researched such a thing. It's just that anyone who's been through a lot of hardships and such, by rights, ought to be a lot more appreciative of dem good things in life, as we say.

KURT: As he says.

JIM: *What's my follow-up question, Kurt?*

KURT: Why does 9-Jack-9 dress like **Elton John?**

SCOTT: Hey! Jack dressed that way before I saw any of Elton's new videos. God, that's so depressing.

THE LEGENDARY BRIAN DEWAN: *I* don't think of **Elton John** when I look at 9-Jack-9.

Above: 9-Jack-9 or Elton John?

Left: The ill-fated Prince Drufus of Sirius IV.

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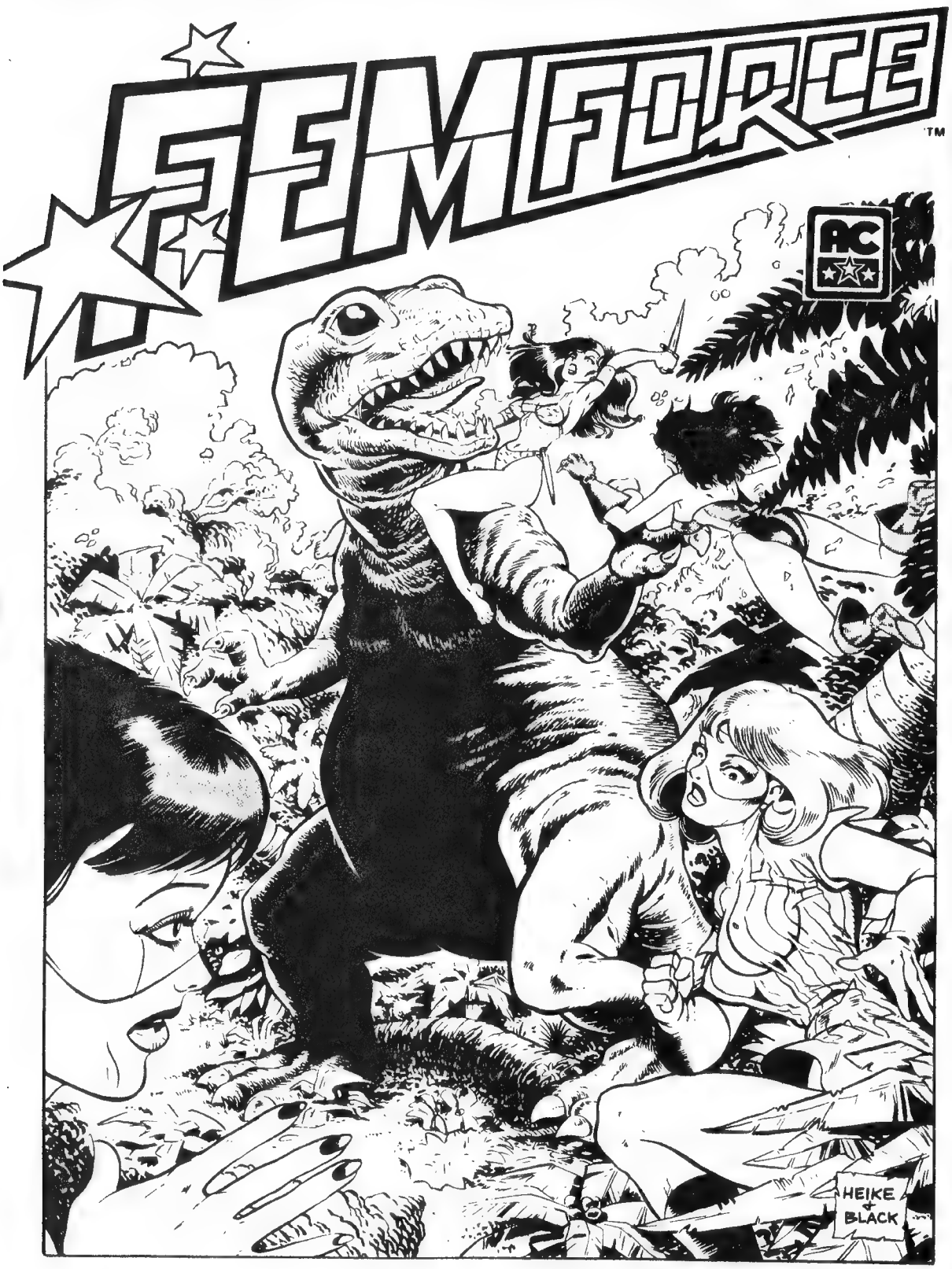


"People who never read comics like ZOT!"

KURT: You know, one of my continual criticisms is that you have eight or nine people in the main cast and four of them don't do anything for the first ten pages except accuse each other — but maybe that's too specific.

JIM: *No, I like that. I was about to ask that.* (Laughter.)

SCOTT: Seriously one of my big problems, and I did know about it even before Kurt said it, is that I do sometimes run into problems, even when I have a full 28 pages, just getting in all the characters that I'd like to — because I'm finding that it takes up a lot of room doing even short character exposition when you have like 10 or 12 characters. I know it *can* be done. I've *seen* it done, and Kurt is always pointing out to me how well a writer like **Leonard Starr** can do that.

KURT: Here's your follow-up question from Jim. *(Laughter.)*

SCOTT: This isn't fair!

KURT: ZOT! is a comic with a lead character whose name is on the cover and he has the costume and he's a fun guy, but it seems to me that ZOT! is actually an ensemble book. The plot in issue #6 with Vic and Drufus in the desert is important — maybe more important — than the plot with Jenny, Zot and Jack in the castle,

SCOTT: You're right that the Drufus and Vic story in #6 was basically the featured story. I told the story because they're part of the cast; they're worth featuring. Zot will always be there, but he won't always be the most important thing in the book. And I think this is workable, in ZOT! at least. Zot's being on the cover, and being in every story and all that, essentially says to us that something about Zot is relevant to every issue. Zot is more or less the focus of this running theme of Hope. He tends to remind us that he's got the spirit in him of making things better, no matter what the odds are, and it's almost an irrational spirit, but it keeps on coming back and justifying itself. So even when he isn't in the panel, that attitude is in the book, and his presence is felt, even when I take time out to tell a story that has almost nothing to do with him. The book could be continued to be called ZOT!, even if the title character was no longer alive, because the book would still be about that ideal that we associate with the character.

JIM: *Three of the major characters are pretty young. How old is Zot?*

SCOTT: Zot's about 13.

JIM: *Why is that?*

SCOTT: The fact that they're children —

JIM: *Kurt doesn't like that question.*

KURT: Hey, he was born in 1971!

SCOTT: Zot's that age partially through chance. I was always coming up with new series ideas every couple of weeks. Zot was just the one that stuck. But this point about my always dealing with the past — with my childhood and such — is very important, and the reason it ties in with this broader theme, I hope, is that we tend to look ahead a lot, to the exclusion of looking back. In our society it seems to be an either/or proposition: we either look to the future or look to the past, and we don't bring those together an awful lot. And ZOT! is an attempt, at bringing those two together. For a lot of reasons. Now one of them is going to sound a little morbid, it has to do with nuclear war, which is as likely now as it was when I grew up, although it's not so fashionable to worry about that now. Anyway, because the future may be such a dead-end proposition, I'd like very much to go into the past and to look at all of our *old* hopes for the future, and see what was worth saving about them, and ask whether we really had to leave all of them behind us the way we did. I'm always trying to look back and see where we've been, what we've left behind, where we're going and all that stuff... I'm rambling.

KURT: He's a rambling guy.

SCOTT: It's just a way of covering my bets. If we really do screw up and, for whatever reason, we lose civilization in the process, ZOT! will have been my little swansong for all of the futures that we blew, that we'll never achieve. And if we *do* get through the next 20 or 30 years, ZOT!'s my way of saying that those old futures never really died at all, and we shouldn't be disappointed that New York doesn't look like an Art Deco dreamscape because *it still can.* Any architect who feels like designing an Art Deco building can do it anytime he likes. All he needs is somebody who feels like paying him for it, and if we really want to design hovercrafts that people can fly around in on a Sunday afternoon, we still can. Maybe not yet, but we probably will. That's not that difficult. Some will never happen. Boot jets will probably never happen; there's just reasons why that doesn't work. But a lot of what I'm going to present in Zot's world is something of a promise that if we can guarantee that we have a future — which is step one — then it really can be as great as all of those naive ideas that people cooked up ten, twenty, thirty or even a hundred years ago.

"I'd like people who aren't reading comics

LESLIE

Although most fans probably aren't aware of it, AMERICAN FLAGG! colorist Leslie Zahler has not one secret identity, but two of them. Her fictional persona, ace zeppelin pilot Crystal Gayle Marakova, appears at irregular intervals in the pages of AMERICAN FLAGG!, while Leslie spends her off-duty hours in the guise of Mrs. Howard Chaykin. But, before her marriage to Chaykin, Leslie hadn't had much exposure to comics, learning color theory by working as an artist and textile designer, and it became obvious that an interview with her would offer a unique perspective on the world of four-color reality.

The interview took place in the Chaykin's comfortable, tasteful East Side apartment, the walls of which are crammed with framed artwork, ranging from contemporary fine art and vintage illustrations from the 30s, to work by some of Chaykin's comics contemporaries, like studio-mate Walt Simonson. In person, Leslie Zahler is a bright, personable and very attractive woman who made me feel at ease in her home. I must confess, however, that the experience was tinged with a slight feeling of unreality as I found myself interviewing the alter ego of one AMERICAN FLAGG! character while the real-life counterpart of Raul the Cat (whose name is Cochise, by the way) sat on my lap, purring and licking his toes...

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *Leslie, how did you get into coloring comics?*

LESLIE ZAHLER: I got into coloring comics when **Lynn Varley** decided she couldn't do two books at once — that was RONIN and AMERICAN FLAGG! — so **Howard Chaykin** asked if I'd like to take over, and I did.

STEVE: *What kind of art background did you have?*

LESLIE: Well, I was a textile designer. I studied textiles design, color, art history, while I was in college — so I feel very well grounded in the problems of color.

STEVE: *Theory?*

LESLIE: Color theory, yeah. I'm a big follower of **Johannes Eaton**, the color theorist of the early 20th century.

STEVE: *Does Howard give you color notes?*

LESLIE: The extent of the notes he gives me really only have to do with specific mood feelings, or if something isn't quite clear in the black-and-white artwork — that it's nighttime, or it's daytime. But that's the extent of Howard's notes to me. He trusts my feelings about color, and he goes over the job when I'm finished. We've had some screaming matches, but predominately I've done what I wanted to do, and he's been happy with it.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Leslie Zahler
Occupation: Colorist & Artist's Rep
Residence: New York City
Born: 9 September, NYC; one of the few born and bred.
Credits: Colorist for AMERICAN FLAGG.
Hobbies: Reading, going to the movies.
Favorite Films: The last film I saw that I really liked was EDUCATING RITA.
Musical Tastes: I like 1950s jazz and '60s and '70s rock and roll, and even earlier than that – Sarah Vaughn and Charlie Parker.
Favorite Color: Black.
Favorite President: The dead ones.

STEVE: *So he doesn't look over your shoulder as you're coloring?*

LESLIE: No. He started doing it on my very first job, and I told him he was making me nuts, and he'd better let me make my own mistakes and he could make corrections when I was finished. I'd be more than happy to change whatever he wanted, after I was finished. But we couldn't work that closely together, because we'd probably kill each other.

STEVE: *Where do you work when you're coloring?*

LESLIE: In the studio right next to the room we're sitting in now. It's fully set up, from when I was a textile designer, and I have a rack of dye set up, and I work at the drawing board with whatever reference is around. It's a nice little room. It's light, quiet. It's a private space, basically.

STEVE: *What do you color the Xeroxes with?*

LESLIE: Dr. Martin's dyes. What I've done is mixed up small bottles for each of the colors — in the four-color process you're allowed three tones of red, three tones of blue, and three tones of yellow. That's 100 percent strength, 50 percent strength, and 25 percent strength. It's all the permutations of the combinations that those three colors will make that's the full palette of colors for the four-color process.

STEVE: *Do you feel somewhat limited by the comic-book coloring and printing process?*

LESLIE: I feel extraordinarily limited, because what you've colored is only a guide for the person who does the separations. The separations are done by hand, by somebody who is not particularly schooled in the sense of aesthetics, and you're leaving a lot up to their discretion, and because the separations are done physically, it leaves a lot of room for errors. You also don't really have a

to start reading books like FLAGG!"

ZAHLER

"I haven't seen a lot of successful color work."

range of beiges and browns and grays and really pastel colors, or dark colors . . .

STEVE: *Or even good fleshtones.*

LESLIE: Or even good fleshtones. What you have is the 63 combinations that red, blue and yellow in three strengths can provide you with, and that's extraordinarily limiting to somebody who has worked in the field of textiles, where you can go and ask for a change in color of 15 percent, or 10 percent. Here we're dealing in terms of 25 percent only, so it really is very limiting as to what you can do.

STEVE: *Is there any chance FLAGG! will be colored using a laserscan process in the future?*

LESLIE: Funny you should mention it. At this very moment I am coloring the graphic novel —

STEVE: *So FLAGG! will be in the bookstores?*

LESLIE: Yeah, I think that's where it belongs. I'd like to see people who aren't reading comics now start reading books like FLAGG!.

STEVE: *Do you think you'll attract any readers from the hardcore science-fiction crowd?*

LESLIE: Well, we've gotten very, very good response from science-fiction people already. **Ed Bryant** attempted to have FLAGG! nominated for a Hugo Award.

STEVE: *Unfortunately, I think it's a sad fact that science-fiction fans are notoriously snobby about comics. They've got their particular mania and they don't want to look at anything else.*

LESLIE: That's very true. I don't know a lot of science-fiction fans. From what I understand about the field, though, and from what I know about comics, there aren't very many science-fiction comic books that are done to their satisfaction.

STEVE: *Speaking of science fiction — this is going off on a tangent, I think, but it's well within the realm of coloring — is there an overall visual aesthetic for your depiction of the future?*

LESLIE: I very much try to keep a very specific look for the Plex mall. I believe that since it was sort of designed to look like a gigantic shopping mall, that the colors would be fairly antiseptic, pastel looking, very, very clean looking, and I've tried to keep the feeling of that. The clothing, I tended to go more towards rich colors. It's sort of a New Wavey look, so I decided to go with New Wave colors for the clothing.

STEVE: *So you said you try to emphasize the sterility of that environment. Do you see it as an empty, unpleasant place to live?*

LESLIE: Yeah, I do. I think it's been designed to look that way. The whole environment has always, in black-and-white artwork, looked to me like a giant shopping mall. Those places are to me the most unhuman places to live, so I've tried to carry that across.

STEVE: *Even in the apartments where the characters live, there's no intimate spaces there. The apartments are just as sterile as the stores, and the Mall.*

LESLIE: Yeah, I think they are. There's not a lot of space there. A lot of people living there in fairly small space, except that it's a gigantic building, but it's still one building. People are going to be cramped and you're not going to have a lot of living space, and consequently, I keep the colors lighter, just to make you think you're in a more open space.

STEVE: *Do you ever bring in some of the more psychological aspects of color theory, such as making a room pink to pacify the people inside? They've started doing that with holding tanks in jails.*

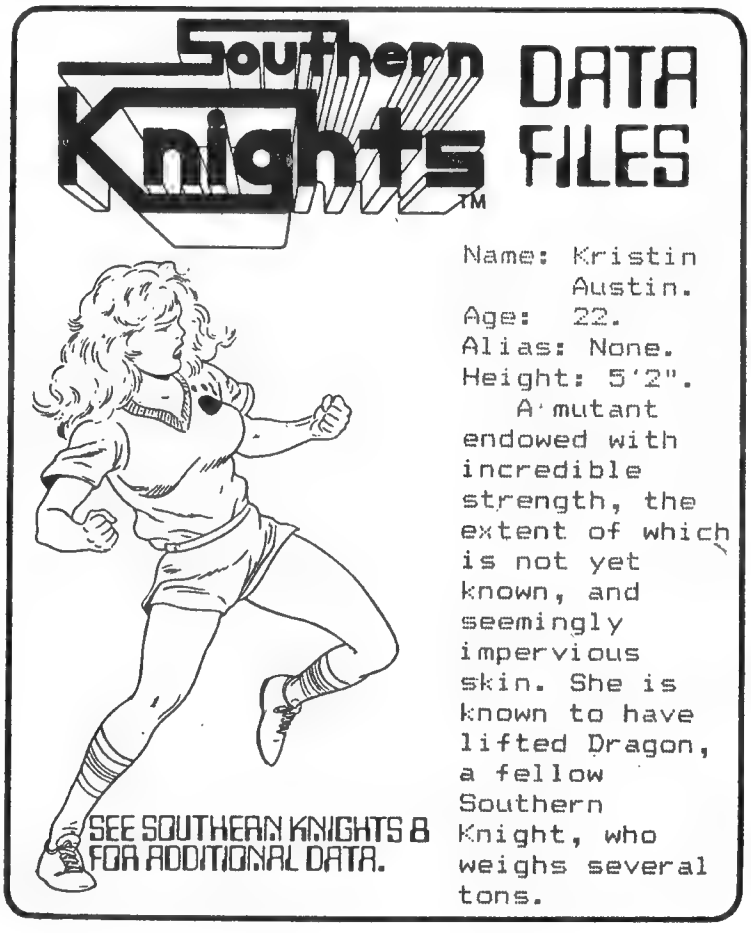
LESLIE: I do that to some extent, but I think that, really, the palette is so limited in the four-color process that it's almost impossible to do. What I've tried to do is keep it pastel. You can't use tones in this process and on this paper to give good contrast. You really have to go light to dark as your sense of contrast, instead of using tones, like reds against greens and violets against yellows, which I am doing in the full-color process, with the graphic novel. I'm experimenting much more with contrast of hues rather than lights to darks.

STEVE: *Have you started reading more comics since you started working on FLAGG!?*

LESLIE: I certainly have!

STEVE: *What do you like?*

LESLIE: I like a lot of the European things. I love their sense of color. I like LOVE AND ROCKETS. I've been reading **Walter Simonson**'s THOR. I really like to see the limits of comics pushed.


Southern Knights™
DATA FILES
Name: Kristin Austin.
Age: 22.
Alias: None.
Height: 5'2".
A mutant endowed with incredible strength, the extent of which is not yet known, and seemingly impervious skin. She is known to have lifted Dragon, a fellow Southern Knight, who weighs several tons.
SEE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS 8 FOR ADDITIONAL DATA.

"If I were a villain I wouldn't feel so magnanimous."

1984 Howard Chaykin

STEVE: *When you're doing FLAGG!, with Howard's sort of visual graphic approach, with all the little TV screens and the logos, you must go bonkers doing the little logos. You know, trademark names throughout each episode.*

LESLIE: For me, it's just another way that space has been broken up. I try to integrate that as much as I can into the feel of the background. When it should be intrusive into the picture, it becomes intrusive, when it falls back, it falls back. I approach the comic very much as a breakdown of spaces — what's important in the picture, what should recede into the background. Howard puts an awful lot of details into the background that aren't necesarily quite as important as the main figures in the background, so there's decisions that have to be made as to what has to recede. Not everything can be as important, not all the elements can be as important as the shadows in a picture.

STEVE: *So you use the color to pick out which are the most important—*

LESLIE: Right. I think Howard certainly does that in the black-and-white artwork, and I try to enhance that feeling. I believe that color should support the black-and-white artwork, and it may certainly shine on its own, but the main job of the colorist is to tell the story that's already been told in black-and-white more clearly and to make it more aesthetically pleasing.

STEVE: *What would you say is the most difficult aspect of coloring AMERICAN FLAGG!?*

LESLIE: Coloring all the little pieces. I look at Howard's pictures and I look at most of the other pictures that are made in comics and there's just a whole lot more stuff in there. I have a lot of decisions to make because Howard does very, very few panels that have no backgrounds in them. Everything's got backgrounds and everything's got texture, and I have to color in all those little pieces.

STEVE: *Are you influenced in your coloring of AMERICAN FLAGG! by any of the science-fiction films, or any of the fantasy films that you've seen?*

LESLIE: I don't think so. I think mostly that the coloring that I've done so far has been four-color process, so it's very, very limiting as to what you can look at. You just can't get a whole lot of special effects. I've tried to push the 63 colors to their limits, but there really isn't just a whole lot of stuff you can do, as opposed to doing the blue line process. I look at a lot of blue line process books when I'm coloring the comic and I get realy jealous because that's the way I'd like to work. But I mostly look at **Lynn Varley**'s work; I look at **Topi**'s work; I look at **Moebius**'s work.

CRYSTAL GAYLE MARAKOVA
The daughter of Soviet diplomats to the U.S.A. – they named her after an American pop singer – Commander Marakova pilots the Raymond Loewy Designer Liner," an ultra-sophisticated zeppelin.
As an employee of Four World Industries – as well as the daughter of a man who now owns half of Venezuela – Marakova's alliance with Flagg apparently furthers her own interests.

STEVE: *Are there any other American colorists whose work you look at and may pick something up from?*

LESLIE: Not really. I've seen some of **Marie Severin**'s work and that's been awfully good — it's really been top-notch work. I like **Lynn Varley**'s work very, very much. Aside from that, I haven't seen a lot of successful color work being done. I think it's a very new field for the American colorist. They're sort of trying to feel their way through a processs and through changes of color, with the paper, the paper color, and Baxter paper, for instance.

STEVE: *Okay. One final question. How do you feel about having yourself depicted as a character in FLAGG!, Crystal Marakova?*

LESLIE: Well, it's kind of weird. I really didn't think anybody was going to notice, but everybody did. There's something about being preserved for posterity. I think that the character's really good, so that makes me feel good. She's pretty smart, she knows how to fly zeppelins, she's mechanically oriented, so I think she's an okay lady, so I don't mind at all. Maybe if I were a villain I wouldn't quite feel so magnanimous about being depicted in a comic book.

STEVE: *Well, do you see her as Howard's view of you as a person — or is she a totally different person?*

LESLIE: I think she's pretty much a different person. I'm not really very mechanically inclined, if the truth be known.

Coming in APRIL From

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Fantagraphics Books will be distributing ***The Beast Is Dead***, a magnificent full-color, hardbound graphic novel published in France. Entirely written in English, the 92-page graphic novel chronicles World War II using a cast of wolves, bears, dogs, rabbits, cows, monkeys, etc.

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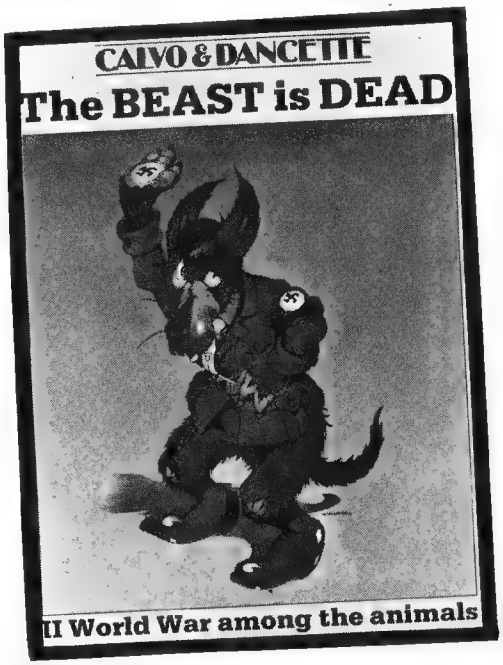
Warning: *A limited amount of these volumes are available, and it is entirely possible that stock will be exhausted by the first wave of orders. Don't miss your chance to sell this prestigious collector's item!*

The Beast Is Dead. 92 pages, full-color, hardcover. Distributed by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in April. $12.95. (Canada: $16.95).



Peter Bagge Serves Up 32 Screwball Pages Of His NEAT STUFF!

From the wilds of New York comes Fantagraphics Books' companion magazine to *Love and Rockets*: ***Peter Bagge's Neat Stuff!***

Bagge, already famous for his contributions to *Weirdo* (which he edits) and other newave productions, here serves up 32 pages of hilarious commentary on the modern life we lead. Included is the "Girly Girl" saga ("She's got her own special brand of humor!"); "Minimum Wage Love"; "Ugly Is In!"; "The Goon in the Moon Constructs a Friend"; the familial escapades of "The Bradleys"; a set of riotous "baseball cards" on the back cover; and, as a change of pace, the touching psychological study "Sometimes I Think I'm Going Crazy."

Peter Bagge's Neat Stuff will appeal to the hip crowd that enjoys *Love and Rockets*, *Weirdo*, and similar more mature magazine titles.

Note: Peter Bagge's Neat Stuff *carries the advisory "Recommended for Mature Readers."*

Peter Bagge's Neat Stuff #1. 32 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in April. $1.95. (Canada: $2.50).

Distribution of Retail Bags Postponed Until May

Fantagraphics Books has postponed the distribution of the promotional retail bags originally scheduled for release in January, 1985, until May 1985. This delay will allow the bags to carry the logo and artwork for the upcoming ***Mechanics*** color mini-series, also scheduled for release in May. Fantagraphics Books will also use the extra time now available to find a more efficient way to distribute the bags, a way in which the bags can reach more retailers than were reached with the previously-released ***Dalgoda*** bags.

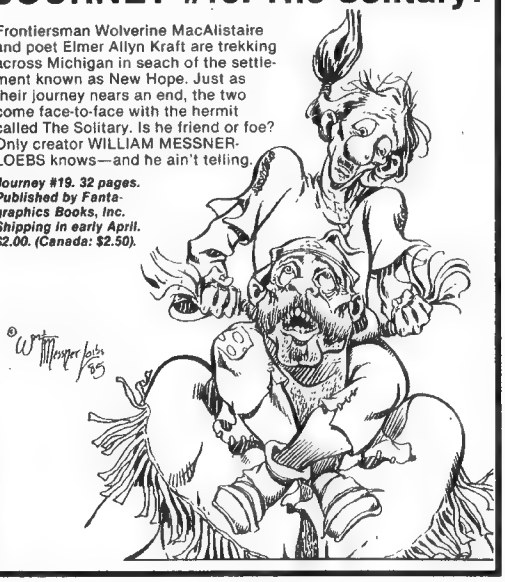
Artwork for these two new bags will include a ***Mechanics*** illustration by JAIME HERNANDEZ, logos for both ***Love and Rockets*** and ***Mechanics***, a ***Dalgoda*** illustration by DENNIS FUJITAKE, and the ***Dalgoda*** logo.

Retailers who received the ***Dalgoda*** bags reported increased sales as a result. Fantagraphics Books expects this set of bags to be even more effective as it helps to promote two color comics instead of just one.

JOURNEY #19: The Solitary!

Frontiersman Wolverine MacAlistaire and poet Elmer Allyn Kraft are trekking across Michigan in seach of the settlement known as New Hope. Just as their journey nears an end, the two come face-to-face with the hermit called The Solitary. Is he friend or foe? Only creator WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEBS knows—and he ain't telling.

Journey #19. 32 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in early April. $2.00. (Canada: $2.50).



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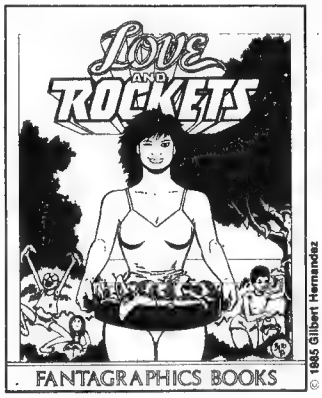
LOVE AND ROCKETS #12: Rocky and Fumble Star!

The outer-space hijinx of JAIME HERNANDEZ's "Rocky and Fumble" strip are promoted to full-length story in ***Love and Rockets* #12**. Not as well-known as the "Mechanics" and "Locas Tambien" series, "Rocky and Fumble" has appeared in a two short stories in previous ***L&R***, and tells tales of a future girl and her robot with the same verve, imagination, and wackiness that Jaime puts in his other strips.

This issue also marks a new starting point for the characters of GILBERT HERNANDEZ's "Heartbreak Soup" strip. Moving in new and unexpected directions, this episode will see the introduction of new characters and a new outlook for other residents of Palomar.



© 1985 Gilbert Hernandez

© 1984 Jaime Hernandez

***Retailers:** Please note that* L&R *#1-6 are now SOLD OUT from Fantagraphics Books and that distributors' supplies are dwindling. Get 'em quick—especially since May will see the premiere of the full-color* **Mechanics** *mini-series, written and drawn by JAIME and colored by PAUL (Mr. X #1) RIVOCHE!*

Note: Love and Rockets *carries the advisory "Recommended for Mature Readers."*

Love and Rockets #12. 32 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in April. $1.95. (Canada: $2.50).

AH #70: Squadron Supreme! AH #71: Alan Moore Talks!

Amazing Heroes #70 previews the off-beat MARK GRUENWALD/BOB HALL *Squadron Supreme* series. The first half of the *Brave and the Bold* checklist. Checking in with DENIS KITCHEN of Kitchen Sink Press. The Golden Age Directory covers Plastic Man and others. The Spider-Man chapter of Jacobs and Jones's "The Comic Book Heroes." Cover feature: The Squadron Supreme.

Amazing Heroes #71 features a long interview with the Englishman who has turned comics on their ear, the prolific ALAN MOORE. Alan will talk about *Swamp Thing*, Marvelman, working on *American Flagg!*, and his new projects. Part two of the Brave and the Bold checklist. Part nine of the Golden Age directory. Plus the Amazing Heroes Top 100. Outrageous cover portrait of Moore by Swamp Thing artist STEVE BISSETTE!

Each issue also features news, letters, an editorial, a silly cover, coming comics, reviews by R.A. Jones, plus a few surprises!

© 1984 Steve Bissette

Amazing Heroes #70. 68 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in early April, $1.95. (Canada: $2.50).

Amazing Heroes #71. 68 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in late April. $1.95. (Canada: $2.50)

COMING IN MAY: FIRST MECHANICS ISSUE, MORE!

***Mechanics #1** begins the serialization of JAIME HERNANDEZ's "Mechanics" story from* Love and Rockets *#2, newly colored, with a new back-up strip, a new cover, and an introduction by ALAN MOORE;*

***Amazing Heroes Preview Special #1**—AH's wildly successful "Preview" concept, now in its own semi-annual magazine;*

***Dalgoda #6**, featuring the climax of the first storyline, and the conclusion of "Grimwood's Daughter";*

***The Ditko Collection Volume II**, featuring more classic material from the co-creator of Spider-Man;*

***Prince Valiant: "The Eternal Quest"**—the follow-up to the superb "Lithway's Law," still full-color;*

***The Comics Journal #99**, featuring an epic interview with FRANK MILLER;*

Plus **Hugo, Journey, Amazing Heroes**, *and more!*

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Amazing Heroes Switches

Due to conflicting schedules, we have decided to switch the cover features on ***Amazing Heroes* #67** and **#69**. Originally scheduled to preview FRANK MILLER's new Batman and Elektra features, **#67** will now preview *Secret Wars II*, while **#69**, originally intended for *Secret Wars*, will display Miller's new work. This will allow us to showcase more of Miller's new artwork, as well as getting the "Secret Wars" preview out before the actual series premieres. We apologize for any inconvenience, but hope that the equal strength of both cover features will eliminate any problems.

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Don: "THE BUYER'S GUIDE owes its

Don & Maggie pose with their Inkpot Awards from the San Diego Comic-Con in August 1976. The award was for "Fandom Projects/Service."

existence to us." Maggie: "We're insidious."

DON & MAGGIE THOMPSON

As far as comics fandom goes, when you say Don and Maggie Thompson, you've pretty well said it all. They've been fans longer than some of us have been living (presuming many of us were born since 1962), they've seen comic-book aficionados in their phases from Silver Age to present, and they've helped shape comics fandom in all its incarnations through their publications. From NEWFANGLES through ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME to THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, they have typed, carboned, mimeographed, laid out, edited, interviewed, researched, criticized, published — even illustrated works for their own or others' fan publications. All of this happened, mind you, while they kept up full-time careers as journalists and parents.

Their current position as co-editors of THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, fandom's largest-selling newpaper, comes as a logical culmination of all that went before. CBG started in the early Seventies as a tabloid newsprint adzine, under entrepreneur Alan Light. The publication became the "marketplace of fandom," a paper in which the faithful could find almost anything *pertaining to their favorite hobby hawked weekly. (My own collection would be a bit poorer had not Mr. Light's creation come along when it did, I can assure you.) The BUYER'S GUIDE was bought out by Krause Publications in the early Eighties. Don and Maggie had been supplying the 'zine for years with a potpourri column of much entertainment value, "Beautiful Baloons"; with the change of ownership, they found themselves drafted into full editorship, and crafted of CBG a tabloid that carries about as many ads, but which festoons itself with far more articles and features than its predecessor and which is now fully typeset, to boot.*

Not surprisingly, circulation of THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE is on the rise. A goodly portion of its success must be laid to the efforts of Don and Maggie, who bring editorial expertise to the paper (and also edit the newsstand comics magazine, COMICS COLLECTOR, another Krause prublication). Fans interested in checking out CBG should write them for a free sample copy at 700 E. State Street, Iola, Wisconsin 54990. What the heck, they've plugged us!

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Donald Arthur Thompson

Occupation: Co-editor, THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

Residence: Iola, Wisconsin

Born: 30 October 1935

Credits: Co-editor (with Dick Lupoff) of THE COMIC-BOOK BOOK and ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME. A couple of published short stories, a few comic-book stories, probably a hundred or so magazine articles, 22 years with THE CLEVELAND PRESS, during which I wrote hundreds of thousands of words — from book reviews to crime news.

Favorite Movies: NASHVILLE, M, THE BELLS OF ROSARITA, THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW.

Favorite TV Shows: DOCTOR WHO, THE TEXAS WHEELERS.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Margaret Judson Thompson
Occupation: Co-editor, THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.
Born: 29 November 1942
Residence: Iola, Wisconsin
Credits: Various and sundry early fanzines with Don, also much material for THE CLEVELAND PRESS, the long-running "Beautiful Balloons" column in TBG with Don. I created and edited FANTASY EMPIRE for New Media Publishing, and Don and I created and edited a publication called THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS, which is now helmed by Ron Goulart. My favorite thing that I've ever written about comics was probably THE SPIRIT article that appeared in THE COMIC-BOOK BOOK.
Favorite Movies: NAPOLEON, LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT, THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW.

"We said there should be a science-fiction

LOU MOUGIN: *Did you have any interesting experiences during your days on the CLEVELAND PRESS, Don?*

DON THOMPSON: Yeah, especially covering crime news. I was involved with some hairy situations.

MAGGIE THOMPSON: He called in a story about a burning building once — from inside the burning building. There weren't any other phones!

DON: It was the middle of the night. Where else was I going to find a phone?

LOU: *How did you get out of that one?*

DON: Quickly. *(Laughter.)* She didn't mention the time that I went up in an attic with a bunch of police after a fugitive who had just killed a policeman.

LOU: *Did they get him?*

DON: Oh, yeah.

MAGGIE: I thought he'd get Don — that was what I was worried about.

DON: The annoying thing was that the photographer chickened out and didn't come in. I wanted him to take some pictures. He waited out in the rain, and the water shorted out his camera, so we didn't have any pictures of them bringing the guy in.

LOU: *Don and Maggie, you've both been in fandom as long as I can remember there being a comics fandom, which goes back at least to the Sixties. How did you become Fans Proper and get together as a team?*

DON: We started out as science-fiction fans. Maggie was kind of born into it because her mother is **Betsy Curtis**, a writer of science fiction for all the top magazines in the Fifties and Sixties. I discovered science fiction when I was in high school, and several years later we met at a science-fiction party held by **Basil Wells**, a pulp science-fiction writer. **Andre Norton, Edmond Hamilton, Leigh Brackett, P. Schuyler Miller** and several other people were there.

LOU: *All the Old Guard.*

DON: Yeah. And so we became friends and, later, more-than-friends. We got talking to **Hal Lynch**, who was an active SF fan at the time, at the World Science-Fiction Convention at Pittsburgh —

MAGGIE: Labor Day Weekend, 1960.

DON: — and we said there should be a science-fiction fanzine with a comics orientation.

LOU: *That was XERO, wasn't it?*

DON: No, XERO was **Dick Lupoff**'s fanzine, but we didn't know about it at the time.

MAGGIE: Oddly enough, the first issue of XERO was distributed at that convention as a giveaway — but we didn't see it then.

LOU: *Sounds like High Irony of the highest caliber.*

DON: Well, it was apparently comic-book time. Because we went home and put out HARBINGER, which was intended to be a one-shot just to let people know we were gathering material for a comics fanzine to be called COMIC ART. That appeared in the fall of 1960, and we came out with the first issue of COMIC ART in March or April of the next year. Unknown to us and independent of all this, **Jerry Bails** came out with the first issue of ALTER EGO in March of that year!

MAGGIE: So we did COMIC ART, and also wound up doing HARBINGER as a separate fanzine for a while, too. And we were in CAPA-alpha almost from the beginning, with RAINY DAYS, so we did all these various publications —

LOU: *And GOSH-WOW, which came along later in the Sixties.*

MAGGIE: That wasn't ours.

LOU: *Oh, sorry.*

DON: That's okay. It's confusing! We later did a news fanzine, called NEWFANGLES, which ran 54 issues and just got to be too much work for us. All of these, of course, were part-time fan projects, and I was working for the CLEVELAND PRESS at the time. I had to be to work at about sunrise — which means I'd have to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning. So staying up until 3 o'clock a.m. collating, stapling, addressing and stamping fanzines — and doing this every couple of weeks — just got to be too much. It got kinda hard to get up and drive into Cleveland.

LOU: *But you kept doing it, year after year!*

DON: Finally, we announced a year in advance that we were planning to pack it in with NEWFANGLES, to give another fan editor a chance to get started. It was the

"This is the one-sheet newsletter that predates the first fanzines of 'organized' comics fandom. It was done to say there should be a comics fandom and get support for it. Fall 1960 or Jan '61 (50 copies).

HARBINGER

Editor: Don Thompson #1 Art Editor: Maggie Curtis

HARBINGER is more than just a one-shot, it is a sighting shot, published in hopes of reaching as many potential supporters of and contributors to COMIC ART as possible.

COMIC ART is a projected fanzine devoted to, as the title suggests, comi art. Not only comic strips and comic books, but cartoons (political, ga or sports); Big/Better Little Books; hardcover or paperbound collections whether of strips or cartoons; animated movie and TV cartoons, etc.

CONTENT will be of several types, designed to appeal to the casual peruser, the avid fan, the collector, or the reminiscer who grows nostalgic at mention of bygone books, strips, episodes or characters.

FOR THE NOSTALGIC, we will have items on old-time heroes, villains or sequences. (The nostalgic are also urged to write to Dick & Pat Lupoff, 215 E. 73 St., New York 21, and ask for copies of XERO; it's free for letters of comment and, if you're at all interested in comic art, you will comment, probably at length, on the series "And All in Color for a Dime," which deals with old-time comic book heroes.

FOR COLLECTORS, we will try to have indices and bibliographies of strips books (comic books and collections) and series characters. Projected on this line: a checklist of Walt Kelly material, indexes of the Tarzan Sunday strips and a list of Dell non-series titles, plus whatever reader ask for that we can get.

FOR THE FANS AND CASUAL READERS, who will probably make up the bulk of our readership, we will have discussions of current strips, examinations of the type of plot used by certain writers and artists, biographies of artists and authors and a host of other material -- if someone will contribute it. Already on hand is an article by Dick Lupoff on super-heroes and costume-heroes.

FOR THE PURISTS, let us point out that the editorial "we" is accurate in this case. Maggie is in charge of the drawing and Don does the writing and text editing, but each has a say in what the other does. We fully cooperate and collaborate on the whole project.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED in receiving or, we fervently hope, contributing to COMIC ART, write and say so. A postcard will do for now, though a little more response is hoped for later on.

fanzine with a comics orientation."

Seventies, by then, and along came **Paul Levitz** and **Paul Kupperberg** — who had been doing ETCETERA — which they had combined with THE COMIC READER, which had been going on for ages —

LOU: *Since 1961, I think.*

DON: It was another one of those things **Jerry Bails** started. He started various projects and then turned them over to other people to continue them. So we helped establish THE COMIC READER as our replacement, since we were phasing ourselves out. We gave **Paul Levitz** his start, if you will. Everything he is today, he owes to us. *(Laughter.)*

MAGGIE: Sure.

DON: I don't want to take anything away from Paul. He's made it to where he is on his own. Anyway, after a few months of our lying around, gasping, **Alan Light** asked us to do a column for THE BUYER'S GUIDE.

MAGGIE: No.

DON: No?

MAGGIE: Alan came to us and wanted to be the publisher of NEWFANGLES, which he wanted to continue as a monthly news magazine. But we had, flatly, had it with news magazines. It's really a lot of work. We never wanted to do that again. He asked us if he could be our publisher — he would provide the bankroll and the circulation, and we would provide the editorial copy. We said, "Don't be ridiculous — of course not."

DON: I had forgotten that. But, anyway, with a beautiful sense of timing, Alan waited another month or two, and asked if we would like to do a news-and-comment column for THE BUYER'S GUIDE.

MAGGIE: Which he had started because we wouldn't let him do NEWFANGLES.

DON: There you go! THE BUYER'S GUIDE owes its existence to us. I keep forgetting all these details, because — Lord- this was a long time ago! We started a lot of people off without realizing it. **Fred Hembeck,** for example, credits us for the for his DATELINE: @!!?# column. We did an illustrated letter of comment to **Bill Spicer's** FANTASY ILLUSTRATED, and Fred told us years and years later that that was the inspiration for his DATELINE pages.

MAGGIE: We're insidious!

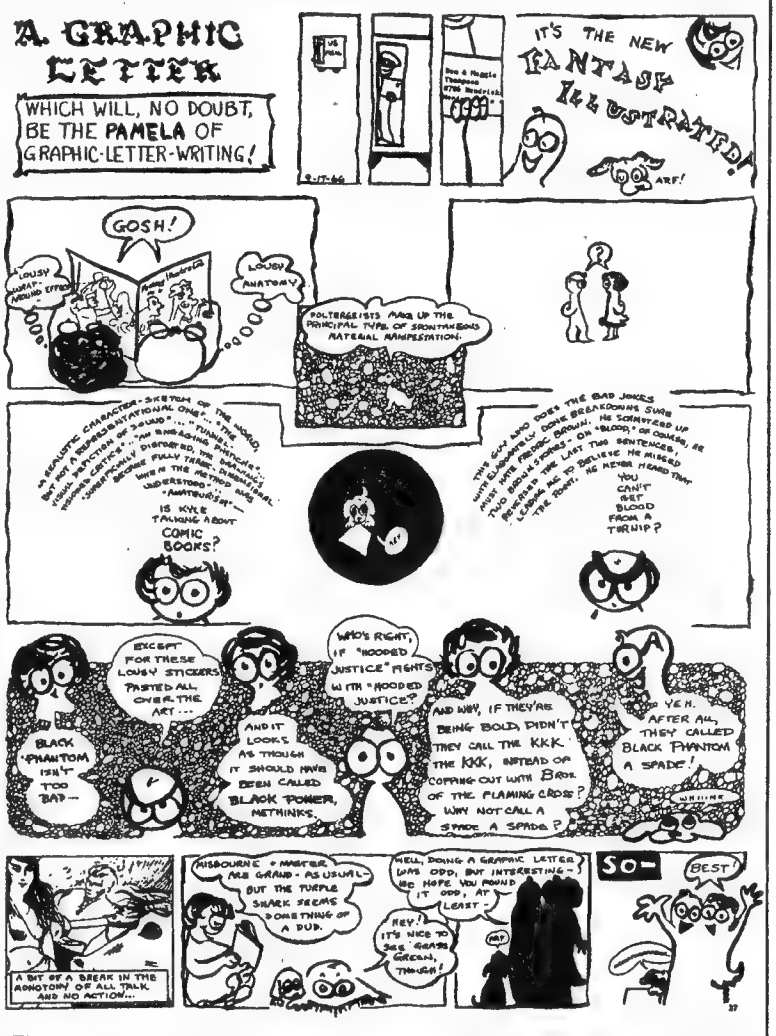
DON: You never know what seeds, when cast aside, will take root and grow into a form you don't even recognize, yourself. Anyway, Alan had a good sense of timing — he waited just long enough for us to get restless over not having any place to —

MAGGIE: Mouth off. *(Laugther.)*

DON: Mouth off, right. I was going to say, "express our opinions," but Maggie's more accurate. So we ended up doing about 150 installments of the "Beautiful Balloons" column for Alan in TBG. Then, in June of 1982, the CLEVELAND PRESS went out of business after 104 years. One hundred and four years for them, 22 years for me — which was pretty traumatic. That fall, Alan called to tell us he'd sold THE BUYER'S GUIDE and FILM COLLECTOR'S WORLD and that when asked who could edit these — someone with journalistic experience, knowledge of comics and of movies, etcetera — he'd recommended us. Krause Publications flew us up, interviewed us for two days, and hired us.

LOU: *So editing the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE is the capstone of your entire fan career.*

MAGGIE: It's like we were training for 20 years each for jobs that didn't even exist when we were training for them.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IS KYLE TALKING ABOUT COMIC BOOKS?
YOU CAN'T GET BLOOD FROM A TURNIP?
EXCEPT FOR THESE LOUSY STICKERS PASTED ALL OVER THE ART...
BLACK PHANTOM ISN'T TOO BAD—
AND IT LOOKS AS THOUGH IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN CALLED BLACK POWER, METHINKS.
WHO'S RIGHT, IF "HOODED JUSTICE" FIGHTS WITH "HOODED JUSTICE"?
AND WHY, IF THEY'RE BEING BOLD, DIDN'T THEY CALL THE KKK THE KKK, INSTEAD OF COPPING OUT WITH BROS. OF THE FLAMING CROSS? WHY NOT CALL A SPADE A SPADE?
YEH. AFTER ALL, THEY CALLED BLACK PHANTOM A SPADE!
A BIT OF A BREAK IN THE MONOTONY OF ALL TALK AND NO ACTION...
NISBOURNE • MASTER, ARE GRAND - AS USUAL - BUT THE TURPLE SHARK SEEMS SOMETHING OF A PUB.
WELL, DOING A GRAPHIC LETTER WAS ODD, BUT INTERESTING - I HOPE YOU FOUND IT ODD, AT LEAST -
HEY! IT'S NICE TO SEE GRASS GREEN, THOUGH!
SO—
BEST

The graphic letter from Don & Maggie, printed in FANTASY ILLUSTRATED 7, that inspired Fred Hembeck (who just happens to be cover-featured in INTERVIEW 22)!

LOU: *Right. There was no such thing as professional comics-fan publications in the Sixties — not even in the late Seventies.*

BILL CHADWICK: *So after more than 20 years in fandom, what would you say are the biggest changes you've noticed?*

DON: When comics fandom started, fans were really nice people who liked comics, admired comics, were interested in them, liked the people doing them, and so forth. Now you have the fans who like to show their superiority by insulting and heckling the people who are turning out the comics. There's a sort of hostility and wise-guy attitude that I dislike enormously. There was none of that, early on. I mean, if you don't like comics, go do something else — go play baseball or something. If you do . . . it's not quite the same as biting the hand that feeds you, but it's similar.

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"Readers want to read about superheroes."

MAGGIE: I would add two other changes. There were comics collectors before, but any sort of organized comics fandom began for all intents and purposes in 1960. Since then, two things have happened. There's been a change in the public perception of the hobby, from "Gosh, you read comics?" to "Gee, I understand they're worth a lot of money." So that's one thing — the outside perception of the hobby. The other is the influence that fans now wield on the professionals. When comics fandom began, quite literally fans weren't even aware who the professionals were. There was so much unsigned work. **Carl Barks'** name was unknown, because that was company policy at Western. Nowadays, the fans can make or break a comic — where, before, they were a fractional percentage of the sales. The direct-sales market is in part responsible for this, but they sort of feed each other — comics fans have an influence they never had before.

BILL: *Well, when you started out as a fan, Maggie, women must have been even scarcer in fandom than they are today.*

MAGGIE: Oh, yes! The first major comics convention was held in New York City, put on by a fan named **John Benson** —

DON: He's still around, he publishes SQUA TRONT.

MAGGIE: — and the number of women who attended was minimal. . . mostly the wives of other fans. **Lee Hoffman** was there. She's a science-fiction and western writer who grew up reading comics. I was there. **Pat Lupoff** was there. One or two others — a secretary at Marvel, whose name I've forgotten.

DON: Flo Steinberg.

MAGGIE: Right. And that was about it. **Paul Krassner,** editor of THE REALIST,

Cover (by Maggie) of the first issue of COMIC ART, the first general-interest comics fanzine. Spring '61 (75 copies).

asked me why so few women read comics and so forth, and I said, "Damned if I know."

DON: With her usual insight. *(Laughter.)*

MAGGIE: Of course, in the Forties, little girls read comics just as much as little boys did — in fact, we devoted an entire portion of COMICS COLLECTOR *#7* to women in comics — where we addressed that question in depth. There are a lot of reasons, such as fewer and fewer comics being produced that interest females. My mother's theory — I think it's probably the most correct on a pragmatic level — is that as the Fifties really took hold, two forces militated against girls continuing to read comics. One was that boys had more of an acceptable range of what they could spend their allowances on, while girls were expected to provide their own make-up and, frequently, their own clothes. Therefore, girls had less disposable income to spend on their reading material. Second, as comics became less widely available, they left a lot of newsstands, and there were no socially acceptable places for girls to hang around and browse through comics.

BILL: *Don, do you have any comments to add?*

DON: I wouldn't presume to argue with a woman on how women feel and what women's experiences were. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Getting back to your current positions, editing COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE and the COMICS COLLECTOR magazine for Krause — how did COMICS COLLECTOR come about?*

DON: It had nothing to do with us. Independent of buying BUYER'S GUIDE — and independent of hiring us — Krause had decided to bring out a publication about comic books. We did not edit the first issue, although we were working here by that time. We did do some advising, and corrected some of the more egregious errors, but had no responsibility for the first issue.

MAGGIE: It's like when we started COMIC ART. Independently and simultaneously, there were other publications springing up, but we had no connection with them and knew nothing about then. So, professionally, history was repeating what had happened, fannishly, 20 years earlier.

DON: After sales came in on the first issue of COMICS COLLECTOR, it was decided to continue publication — but the company wanted it done in-house. It had been edited by some people in Connecticut. This is not too efficient, to have the editorial staff in Connecticut and the publication office in Wisconsin. We got word of our new status while we were in New York at the Forbidden Planet Convention. **Chet Krause** and **Doug Watson**, our publisher, bought us a couple drinks and told us we were going to be editing COMICS COLLECTORS starting with the next issue.

LOU: *That's a nice way to do it.*

DON: So I promptly had a heart attack! *(Laughter.)* Actually, I had been feeling pretty bad for about a week and was, I found out later, having a week-long heart attack at the time. So our first issue of COMICS COLLECTOR — as well as our regular weekly issues of BUYER'S GUIDE and bi-weekly issues of MOVIE COLLECTOR — were suddenly dumped entirely on Maggie, while I was in the hospital and then recovering at home.

LOU: *How did you manage, Maggie?*

MAGGIE: This is an incredibly supportive

"With BUYER'S GUIDE if an issue

company. Everybody sticks together, and so the editors of the other Krause publications — the auto magazines and coin magazines — said, "if there's anything we can do, let us know." There wasn't much. In order to physically lay out and edit the copy — you have to physically lay out and edit the copy! They didn't know what an important comics story would be, for example —

DON: Any more than the average comics fan would have any idea about what an important numismatic or auto story would be. As soon as I recovered a bit, we hired **Kim Metzger** as our assistant, and he helped us catch up on all the stuff that had piled up.

MAGGIE: Then, just about the time we were starting to get things worked out, Don went in for a treadmill test, which he flunked, so they promptly popped him back in the hospital and said he need a triple coronary by-pass operation!

DON: I was in the hospital about a week and a half, and at home for four days, and then I started back at work on a half-day schedule for about a week — after that, I was back full time.

LOU: *You mean you had coronary by-pass surgery and they only gave you a week-and-a-half off?*

MAGGIE: No, the company said, "Stay home and don't work," but Don — the pain in the ass! — wouldn't stay home! *(Laughter.)*

DON: It was boring, sitting at home staring at the walls.

MAGGIE: As a matter of fact, the company continually says, "Wouldn't you like to have the afternoon off — or take a break?" but we're really enjoying this. You have to understand that we're doing what we've always wanted to do.

DON: And we're doing it together, which is really great. We get to spend more time together than we'd been able to in the previous 22 years we were married.

LOU: *What approach are you taking — what audience are you aiming COMICS COLLECTOR at?*

MAGGIE: It's intended for the general reader, as well as the intense hobbyist — the guy who will go for months without sandwiches in order to buy an expensive back issue. We also want to reach the guy who remembers comics from when he was young. We're trying to have articles on each of several topics. We even have articles on comic strips — although you must realize that the comic-strip crowd is a very limited audience, indeed. As opposed to comic books, which are widely available, comic strips are not so widely available, and I think that's a darn shame. Things are better than they used to be, in the sense that we're getting some real historical comic-strip reprints, and even some good public-at-large reprints.

DON: Complete reprints.

MAGGIE: The GARFIELD books are trailblazers, and I wish more publishers would realize that one reason — not the only reason — that the GARFIELD books are so successful is that they don't leave anything out. If you want the complete GARFIELD, you can get it in book form. Every other comic-strip collection for the public-at-large omits some strips.

DON: Even the most popular comic strip in the world — PEANUTS — has strips that get left out of the collections. One of the recent PEANUTS collections, KISS HER, YOU BLOCKHEAD, is almost complete for the period it covers — except that it leaves out eleven strips, for no particular reason. And this is the world's most popular comic strip! Two thousand newspapers, 25 TV specials, four full-length movies, God knows how many items in merchandising — and yet there isn't even a complete collection of PEANUTS. This whole attitude is ridiculous. Can you imagine doing

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doesn't interest you, another will."

a complete collection of **Hemingway** and leaving out a couple stories because, what the heck, nobody will notice?

MAGGIE: So in each issue of COMICS COLLECTOR we try to have something on comic strips, something on current comic books, something on Golden Age comics, something on collecting and so forth — to lead the general audience into more complicated areas.

DON: Even though we've gone from a quarterly to a bi-monthly schedule, the problem is that you've got a magazine that comes out only once every couple months. With BUYER'S GUIDE, we can put out an issue that doesn't interest you, that deals with subjects you don't particularly care about, and there'll be another issue the next week that you will be interested in, so no harm is done. But with a bi-monthly magazine — you've got to appeal to everybody.

MAGGIE: Not only that, but the mail response to issue #1 was virtually unanimous — the readers want to read about current superheroes, things that they're already reading. The fact that **Cat Yronwode** did a fantastic article on the **Caniff** school didn't impress these readers at all. Maybe two people picked that article as their favorite. Well, I thought it was dynamite.

DON: In our estimation that was, by miles and miles, the best article in the issue.

BILL: *Many readers of COMICS COLLECTOR have probably never even heard of Milton Caniff.*

DON: True. Someone may even love comic strips, but the only ones he's familiar with are probably those his local paper carries. If the paper doesn't carry STEVE CANYON and hasn't for 20 years, he won't even know the strip exists. And this is a major strip I'm talking about!

MAGGIE: This is what we're saying about comic strips and their lack of familiarity. If your local paper doesn't carry a strip, you don't even know it exists. There's a marvelous strip, called RUDY, by **William Overgard,** which is absolutely delightful. Each character has its own speech pattern. It's a funny strip — weird. It's about a talking monkey, and it's great. But you've never seen it, and it's not doing well, because it's so strange. It will probably fold before long. And you'd never even know it existed, because it's in so few papers.

DON: We made a real effort three or four years ago to look at every comic strip syndicated in this country. We got hold of editors' and publishers' syndicated lists and checked all this stuff. We saw about 95%, but there was about 5% that we could never find.

LOU: *Speaking of percentages, what's happened with the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE since Krause took over publication and you two have been editing it?*

DON: Sales are up. What's the percentage on that, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Let me give you the actual figures. We're talking paid circulation, because that's the only figure that means a darn thing. Alan used to say his readership was over 10,000, but he was figuring pass-alongs. When Krause bought BUYER'S GUIDE, the paid circulation was 6,743 — that was Alan's last issue. Now, by our most recent statement, it is 10,282.

DON: And it has been going up pretty steadily every week. By going around to conventions and handing it out this summer, we introduced it to some people who had never seen it before.

LOU: *One of your editorials discussed the need for CBG to be distributed through comics shops —*

DON: We're still not getting into all the shops.

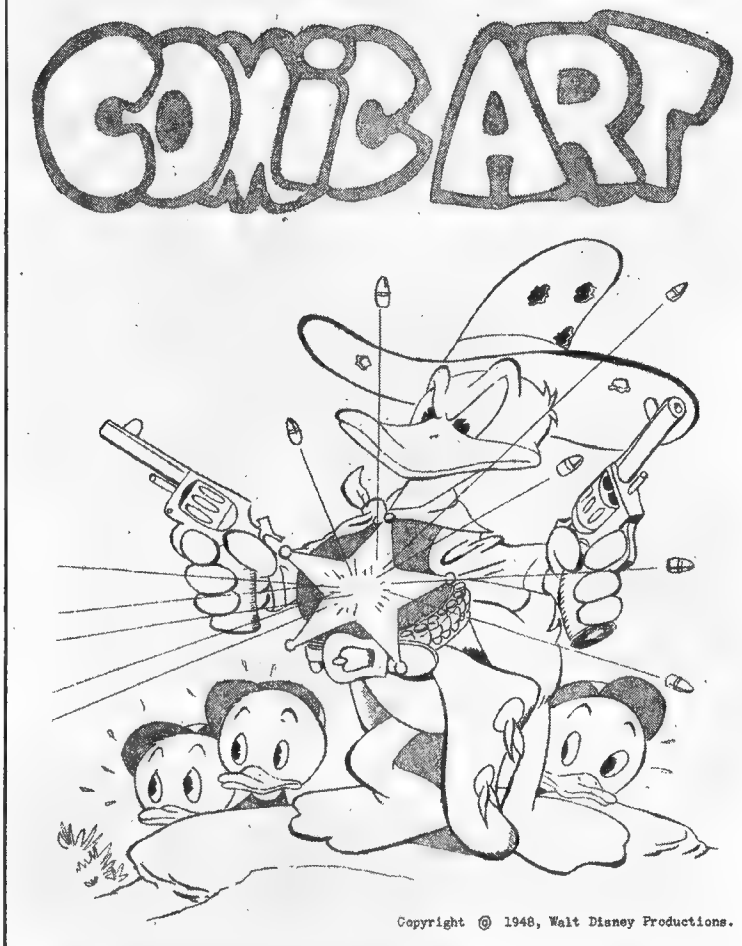
MAGGIE: They've just put the finishing touches on our bulk program, which started with a distribution of almost five hundred — issues, not shops. We will be available on a returnable basis. The program has just begun, and our bulk circulation is steadily increasing.

BILL: *Don and Maggie, if the two of you were in a position of, say, Top High Advisors to both Dick Giordano and Jim Shooter —*

DON: You mean, we're not? *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *— what would you say to them?*

DON: Well, I would certainly suggest that they use the graphic novels not as methods of introducing another new series or putting yet another X-MEN book on the stands that month — but to try some new material from entirely different fields. For example, do a



COMIC ART 7 (October 1968). The last issue to date -- but the first fanzine with such coverage of Carl Barks.

by PHIL WHITE and CINDY MARTIN

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The story is good, too (at least what I've seen of it — the photocopies end abruptly at Page 20), and the comic is certainly the best I've seen from Americomics. I recommend it highly; get it and be one of the first to discover a major new artistic talent.

—***Don Thompson***

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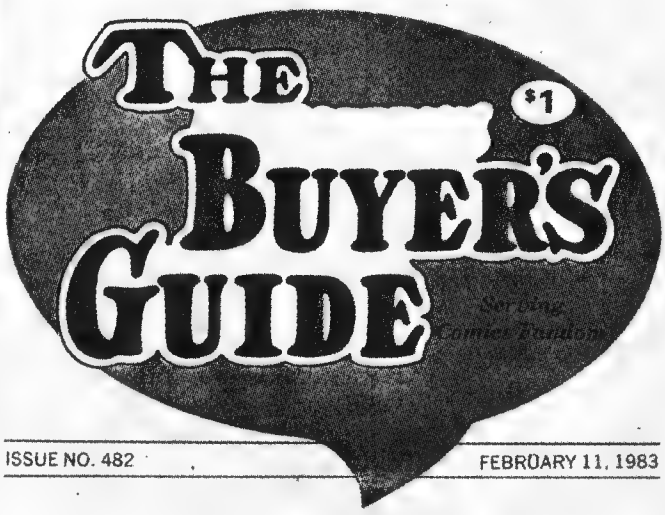
"I dislike when a writer's run out of ideas."

1983 Krause Publications

A handshake closes the deal transferring ownership of **The Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom** *and* **Film Collector's World** *to Chet Krause (left) from Alan L. Light. Light started* **Buyer's Guide** *12 years ago, putting his first issues together in his parents' living room. Krause began his publishing career 30 years ago, laying out the first issue of* **Numismatic News** *on his kitchen table. Both saw their creations grow considerably over the years, until* **Buyer's Guide** *became too large for Light's basically one-man operation and more suitable to Krause's modern plant, which publishes books and periodicals for collectors in many fields of interest.*



From the front page of Don & Maggie's first issue as editors of THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.

a complete collection of **Hemingway** and western. Get something like **Doug Wildey's** RIO, which ran in ECLIPSE MONTHLY, and collect it into a graphic novel. I think a trade paperback, a realistic graphic novel western, could tap into the market that's enjoyed by **Louis L'Amour**, for example. And might get rid of the notion that there isn't any market for western comics. The graphic novels should be aimed more at people who don't read comics. I would also suggest that they periodically review their titles and see if their artists are getting tired, see if they couldn't shake 'em up a bit. If someone is grinding out the same plot month after month for one character, switch him over to another.

MAGGIE: Something I'd like to see the industry do to legitimize the comics field is for all the companies — independents and the two biggies — to get together on a Best Of The Year anthology —

DON: Oh, yes.

MAGGIE: — which would be in a large trade paperback format. Each company has some version of the "best" of its own stuff, but the public-at-large doesn't see those. Getting a Best Of The Year anthology in bookstores is something the producers of all the comics could accomplish. I think it could only increase comic-book readership.

DON: I'd volunteer to edit it.

MAGGIE: Me, too! *(Laughter.)*

DON: We're outside the industry, so we'd be fine, impartial judges.

LOU: *There're a couple more questions I want to get in here.*

MAGGIE: Sure, go ahead.

LOU: *You've been heading the CBG editorial staff for — what is it — a couple years, now?*

DON: Since January of 1983.

LOU: *Who's responsible for the difference between the old look and the new look — the switch to typesetting and so forth?*

DON: Well, all of Krause's publications are typeset, and they all look good. They don't want to put out a publication they're ashamed of. But beyond the fact that it's typeset and that it's tabloid — which they stuck with — it's pretty much our doing. The logo for page one was designed by **Doug Watson**, and other than that, everything we've done has been our decision, as far as I can recall.

MAGGIE: What people sometimes don't realize about BUYER'S GUIDE is that, because it's typeset, you get incredibly more material per page than in the old BUYER'S GUIDE. When we did our column in TBG in the old days, we typed it ourselves and it was reduced — but not by a lot. The number of words on a page was few compared to what we get now. Our ratio of editorial to advertising material has stayed identical with Alan's, and continues to average out to 75% ads to 25% editorial.

LOU: *One of the differences between the old and the new BUYER'S GUIDE is that you have many more columnists now.*

DON: The readers really enjoy our columnists. We tried to keep the old ones, of course — and we've introduced several new ones.

MAGGIE: We didn't kick anyone out. We tried to keep everyone. Any who didn't come with us, it was their decision.

DON: We seemed for a while to have lost **Fred Hembeck**, which we felt bad about, but all his time was spent turning out stuff for Marvel. He's back now.

LOU: *Well, that's where Fred got his start, in the old BUYER'S GUIDE — that's where everyone started reading him.*

MAGGIE: There are other people starting now who are rapidly going to go off and become incredible successes whom we can gloat about, too.

DON: Most popular is **Elizabeth Slaughter,** followed by **Bob Ingersoll**, followed by my comics reviews, followed by **Cat Yronwode**. A lot of people also enjoy **Tony Isabella's** openings and closings on what is otherwise a straight news column — "I Cover the Newsstands." On cartoonists, we get a good response to **Fred Hembeck** and **Brian Pearce,** and of course "Everett True" is extremely popular.

LOU: *What's the reaction of the comics companies to CBG?*

DON: You have to ask them — we're not very good at reading minds — but from what they tell us, they read CBG very thoroughly and carefully. They seem to be aware that we are pro-comics, we're not out to "get" anyone, and we do our darnedest to disseminate the news fairly. If we've got a complaint or correction, we run the correction the same place we ran the story. We don't run a story on page one and then bury the correction back in the classifieds.

LOU: *I've noticed that. Another thing I've noticed is that you've taken harder editorial stands on various subjects than the old BUYER'S GUIDE. What kind of reactions have you gotten?*

DON: Well, what we hope from our editori-

"We're not out to 'get' anyone."

als is not that our solitary opinion will change anything, but that if we express an opinion, people will write in and argue for or against it, and give the industry an idea of how the majority of people feel. We prefer to take an editorial stand for something and generate some support for it. We get a lot of thanks from people who tried a comic they might not otherwise have tried, because we reviewed and recommended it.

LOU: *I've noticed that the debate in your columns doesn't descend to the backbiting and in-fighting, usually, that I see in other comics-oriented publications.*

BILL: *Now's your chance!*(Laughter.) *What are you currently pleased about in comics — and what really irks you about comics today?*

DON: I'm enormously pleased with the recent resurgence of funny comic books. I've just been doing a batch of reviews and it seems like one out of every five comics that came out this month is basically humorous — BLUE DEVIL, STIG'S INFERNO, NORMALMAN, CEREBUS, and several others. I've also been impressed with **Alan Moore's** SWAMP THING. It is some of the almost evocative writing, with one of the freshest looks at a long-established character, that I've ever seen. What I dislike about comics is when a writer's been on a book for years, has long since run out of ideas, and is just going through the motions.

MAGGIE: My views tend to be Don's views, in this case, because I get the cream of the crop without looking at the rest of the comics. If Don comes across something that's enormously amusing or exciting, he says, "You've got to read this," and I do. But if he's bored or irritated by something, I don't see it, unless it's supreme idiocy — like a recent sequence in which a character successfully flushed a revolver, or was it —

DON: It was a .45 automatic.

MAGGIE: — down the toilet.

DON: What annoys me is that here's a writer who's too lazy to give something five seconds' thought. Anyone who stops to think about it is gonna realize it's something that can't be done!

MAGGIE: Trends on the good side are aiming comics at the younger readers, which is exciting, and the continued development of the independent market, which is equally exciting. Those are both things that could — potentially — give a much-needed variety to what has become a not-very-varied artform.

DON: Let me just say that I do applaud what I see as an increasing tendency among writers and artists to give some thought to how superheroes really would react and would be regarded, if there were such a thing in the real world. Sometimes it doesn't work out too well, but at least they're looking at it.

MAGGIE: There's also a commendable playing with potential, as in GRIMJACK — sort of an attitude of "How can we play with what has existed as an artform for quite a long time. Is there anything fresh we can do with it?" Crossovers that never would have been possible a few years ago have been attempted through the ingenuity of some authors.

BILL: *Such as — ?*

MAGGIE: The "Munden's Bar" sequences. We've also had a crossover in JOURNEY that was extremely strange.

DON: Normalman crossing over into JOURNEY.

LOU: *In closing, what's in the future of CBG?*

DON: It will always be evolving, but the changes won't be as dramatic as when we first took over.

MAGGIE: Every time anyone makes a complaint or a suggestion, it's discussed here, although the final fruits may not appear for a year! When we first did CBG, it was in two sections, and no one like that. We worked and worked and worked, and we got it into one section, which solved that problem. People still had a wistful longing for the camera-ready ads that **Alan Light** used to run, so we came up with a way to maintain the camera-ready copy without having it hurt the other contents.

LOU: *You mean, the "Comics Trader" section?*

MAGGIE: Right. So if people make suggestions, we work on them.

DON: No suggestion is ignored. At the very least, Maggie and I talk it over. If it's a larger thing, we talk with **Doug Watson** or **Chet Krause** about it.

MAGGIE: People had this image that Krause is this corporate super-structure, transplanted from Madison Avenue —

DON: "Madison Avenue" was the term often applied.

LOU: *With Morgan Edge at the head of it.*

MAGGIE: Exactly! We had a party for comics professionals who live in Wisconsin during the summer —

DON: — and for some fans. This was Chet's idea, and he followed up by saying, "How about if we have a barbeque and I make the hamburgers?"

MAGGIE: He did, too.

DON: Afterwards, he sat around chatting about publishing with **Denis Kitchen**. It's that sort of atmosphere. Iola, Wisconsin, has a population of just over 1000. We love it. The nearest traffic light is thirteen miles away.

MAGGIE: It's the kind of a town where our daughter is a waitress in the restaurant and knows most of the policemen and most of the people in the county and says hello to them on the way to school.

LOU: *So after more than 20 years in fandom, what comics-oriented project that you've been involved with has given you the most pleasure?*

DON: I really enjoyed doing the books with **Dick Lupoff**, but I enjoy what I'm doing now more than anything else I've ever done.

LOU: *How about you, Maggie?*

MAGGIE: I'd have to say the same thing. It's a dream come true. You hear the cliche from various people — but this is exactly what I want to do!

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

DON & MAGGIE ARE UNSUNG HEROES

DAK:

Apart from a few suggestions for future COMICS INTERVIEW subjects, I have one major request/complaint about #14: If you run another letter by **Barry Dutter** in regards to the She-Hulk, I will never buy your magazine ever again. As you know, this is far from a mere defense of a character on my part. This has become a personal vendetta. Granted, Barry is capable of writing decent letters, and I even agree with him about SECRET WARS. If he wants to pick on characters, okay. Let him do so. But if he's out to pick on innocent people and ruin other people's enjoyment of comics, then he's gotta find another hobby, because we don't want him. And if he chooses a friend of mine to pick on, then he just better watch out.

The mere fact that you wasted about five inches of your letter column with Barry's same old stuff was balanced out quite nicely by the one from **Amy Sacks**. At least there is still room for constructive, intelligent commentary in the CI letter column, not to mention requests. I'd like to see some of the following as interview subjects:

WILL EISNER: When I first saw his work, I thought it was from about the mid-Sixties, but it turned out to be a SPIRIT section from 1948 (in a Warren reprint, of course). Upon examination of his other SPIRIT work, I concluded that the man was definitely ahead of his time, as compared to a lot of the static work still being produced in the latter part of the first decade of comics. His work today is still sharp and makes a lot of other "pros" look pale.

BILL WOGGON: In the past several months, he's had KATY KEENE pulled out from under him (ironically, in the same year that Katy graces the cover of the OVERSTREET PRICE GUIDE), with the title turning into a third-rate cheapjack romance comic virtually overnight. His views on the current Katy situation would be no less than provocative. (And what do **Craig Leavitt, Barb Rausch,** and all those other veteran Katy fans think about this "new" Katy?)

TRINA ROBBINS: One of the old masters (mistresses?) of the underground who, even with the underground virtually gone (I like to think the direct-sales market killed the underground, also there was nothing left to express there that couldn't be done in direct-sales), still finds room for self-expression in her many projects in the mainstream. Now she's preparing a comic for kids!

DON AND MAGGIE THOMPSON: Two veteran comics fans who are perhaps the hardest working unsung heroes of the industry. Editing COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE isn't a part-time job, and Don and Maggie do their job well.

Also about #14: As far as **Gary Groth** is concerned, I recently got a copy of COMICS JOURNAL by mistake from my former subscription service. If it hadn't been the **Will Eisner** issue, I would have thrown the damn thing down the toilet. I won't deny the CJ folks the right to say what they want, but a lot of their views do not jibe with me, particulalry their Marvel-be-damned attitude. There are a lot of Marvel books I don't like (CONAN, DAZZLER, G.I. JOE, TRANSFORMERS, POWER PACK, MICRONAUTS, etc.), but I'm not condemning the company for it. As for SECRET WARS, to me it isn't the blockbuster it was touted to be. Each issue looks the same as the one before it, with only the **Bob Layton** fill-in having even satisfactory art. If I wasn't ten issues into the book, with two to go, I'd drop it like a bad habit. Fine interviews on some shaky subjects.

Dave Mackey
180 Whalepond Road
Oakhurst, NJ 07755

Not even Don & Maggie are a match for the She-Hulk, who muscled her way past the co-editors onto the cover of the current issue of COMICS COLLECTOR.

Thanks for your long and detailed letter of commentary, Dave. You will no doubt be pleased to know that a Bill Woggon interview is on the slate — and by now you've certainly noticed this issue's interview with Don and Maggie! Always happy to oblige — so stick with us, Dave, since our avowed goal is to eventually get around to interviewing everyone in the wonderful world of comics.

—DAK

MOST INFORMATIVE MAGAZINE

Dear Dave,

I enjoy COMICS INTERVIEW immensely. It is the most informative comics magazine on the market today. I would like to see an interview with **Mike Grell** and an interview with the co-creators of the new Justice League of America.

Alf Clayfield
Waterloo, Ontario

WEALTH OF INFO

Dear Dave,

Many, many thanks for having me on your mailing list and sending me COMICS INTERVIEW. I appreciate and enjoy it very much. It's a valuable wealth of information.

Dick Ayers
White Plains, NY 10604

BARRY DUTTER = HOT AIR

Dear DAK,

You gents never run outta steam, do you. COMICS INTERVIEW just gets better and better all the time. Loved the **Matt Wagner** interview, especially. **Groth's** comments were interesting, but not valid enough to persuade me to start reading the JOURNAL again.

So Gary says that DALGODA is an excellent comic done with "grace, wit, and intelligence," hmmm. Well, he's absolutely right, but comics like THE NEW TEEN TITANS and ALPHA FLIGHT are done with those qualities, as well. By stating that all superhero comics — and by extension, most comics — are "moron literature" and not worth a glance, Gary's endorsing a point of view as narrow as the one that states comics start and end with swill like the SECRET WARS. Too bad. Like most people who set rigid guidelines on what constitutes "great entertainments," he's missing a great deal.

Another (alleged) gentleman who never seems to run out of steam — correction: hot air — is everyone's favorite letterhack, **Barry Dutter**. If memory serves me correctly, this is his fifth or sixth letter concerning ol' Jennifer Whatsername. I must admit that I've really come to enjoy his tirades in (how did **Berke Breathed's** Opus put it?) "the same vague, awful way that I enjoy the A-TEAM," and look forward to them every month. (The same way you'd look forward to rent hikes, pneumonia, or neutron bombs being dropped in you backyard.) I personally maintain that it's Barry, not She-Hulk, that's giving men, women, comics, fan mail, New Jersey, and existence in general, a bad name. At least **Meloney Crawford** said that it's She-Hulk's personality she doesn't like, and she only spent a sentence or two on the subject, unlike Barry, who simply hates her-'cause she's there, and by this time, has probably spent enough in postage for his anti-She-Hulk campaign to pay off a fifth of the National Debt.

I realize that it's too late to exit this debate with anything approaching dignity (you know how we intelligent sluts are, Barry), but I'll make this my final word on the subject, anyway. Unlike **Mr. Dutter**, I can think of several things I'd rather spend my 20 cents postage on, so I guess I'll go put my money where my mouth is (or rather, where my typewriter isn't).

Thanks for listening, guys, and see you in thirty.

Amy Sacks
(Still Somewhere in the Big Apple)

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BARRY DUTTER LOVES SHE-HULK

Dear Editor,

Your mass assault on the person and persuasion of **Barry Dutter** was well-formulated, exquisitely-timed, masterfully-played, but I fear that it will ultimately prove ineffectual. I have been following with much amusement his attacks on the character She-Hulk for some time (it's too delicious a farce to ignore), and if he is the She-Hulk hater he seems, then he won't be derailed by your efforts. Fanatics cannot be logically reasoned with, they only know cause.

To be honest, however, I'm not even all that certain he is the She-Hulk hater he has presented himself to the world as being. This is going to get a little complex (even though that is a contradiction of terms), but I believe that Barry may have an "I (heart) she-Hulk!" T-shirt hidden away somewhere in his closet.

To understand this observation it is essential for you to digest this little morsel: Marvel super-heroines have not fared well over the last dozen years. With only minimal research it can be established that Marvel's Mighty Women have a much higher tendency, on percentage ratios, to die, disappear, lose their powers, undergo major emotional conflicts, undergo drastic psychological upheavals, have their powers diminished, be subjugated, be relegated to secondary and even tertiary roles, experience brutalization, experience severe mutation and be cancelled, than do Marvel's Men. Phoenix, Ms. Marvel and Moondragon as a group have undergone all of the above.

It has become impossible to maintain a long-term fanship of any Marvel superheroine because, unlike their male counterparts, they are no longer allowed any long-term stability. They exist these days as little more than objects to be exploited and discarded at whim.

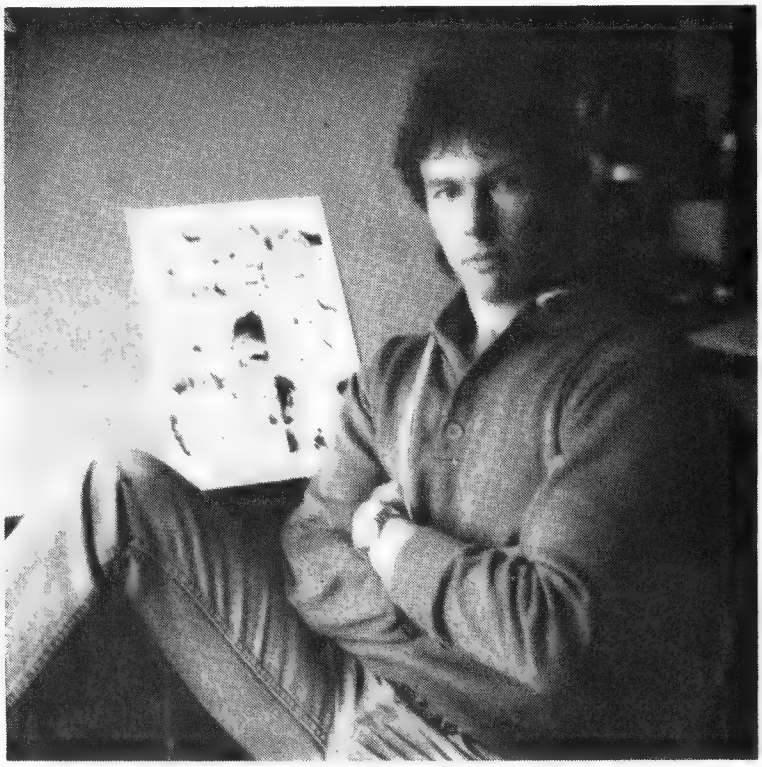
What can be done to alter this situation I cannot say. Marvel Comics no longer retains any interest in its fans or their perceptions (witness the ever-increasing banality of their letters pages) and is constantly at odds with some or another faction of the comics world (a sign of instability).

Barry Dutter has the solution, and it is so simple and envious that it is no surprise that nobody ever tumbled onto it before. Here's what you do:

Pick your favorite Marvel character, title, costume, convention, etc., think of the most asinine reason possible by which to ridicule it and demand its dissolution, enter into a letter campaign to that effect (be prepared for a protracted battle as Marvel will naturally resist you so that it will be shown by them that they don't listen to stupid people), ignore all attempts to get you to see reason, turn those attempts back upon their originators by whatever means you can (even if you have to make one up), and then sit back and enjoy what you love (whatever it is) secure in the knowledge that you've ensured its survival.

Barry Dutter loves She-Hulk. My hat is off to him.

Darrel L. Boatz
3885 Camelot Circle –203
Decatur, IL 62526



Val Mayerik

SIMPLY SPLENDID

Dear Fictioneers:

I have enclosed $30 for one copy each of the first 15 issues of your simply splendid magazine, COMICS INTERVIEW. Please rush them to me as quickly as possible. Keep up the good work.

Rob Helmerichs
1101 S 7th Street –17
Minneapolis, MN 55415

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT RUNS AMOK

Dear David,

I was interested to read **Val Mayerik** and **Steve Gerber's** comments on VOID INDIGO in #15. In particular, I thought it was great that **Gerber** came right out and said that VOID INDIGO might (or would) be offensive to some people.

I have admired much of **Gerber's** work in the past, and no doubt will feel similarly about much of his future stuff, but from all the advance publicity that VI had received I had decided not to purchase it. (The high price of graphic novels and hig-quality-paper comics influence me a *bit*, too. My wallet keeps complaining to me about all the money I'm spending on "just comics." The wallet is pestering me to buy a can of leather-enrichment treatment... but then, wallets are notorious for a lack of artistic vision, aren't they?) Although it has yet to be definitely proven, VOID INDIGO would appear to be not to my tastes, as it seems to reflect the darker side of **Gerber's** vision, without the balancing elements of humor and (some) hope that are usually present in his work.

However, it appears as if I won't get a chance to see if I'd like VOID INDIGO, even if I decided I *wanted* that chance. The VI series has not appeared here yet and apparently is not ever destined to. Although I can't officially substantiate it (though I consider my source to be "usually reliable"), I'm told that VI has been declared "obscene" by Canada Customs and thus cannot be imported into the country. Apparently, the graphic novel was on sale for a while, but it was ordered pulled from the stands after a short time.

I don't know where this leaves us in Canada. Is this an isolated incident or does it indicate a new interest by the authorities in comics. Incidentally, a ratings system, as much discussed in the fan press of late, would not have helped in this case, since "obscene" literature cannot be sold to *anyone*, regardless of age. And if a ratings system *was* in place, would it recommend that certain issues (or series) not be imported into Canada, thus becoming in effect a "voluntary" censorship board? Or would it deal overall with the differing standards (and laws) in the U.S. and Canada (and other countries). Such differences definitely do exist. For instance, as far as I understand the matter, movies that are rated "X" in the U.S. are generally illegal ("obscene") in Canada unless heavily edited. In a case that is making the front pages in Toronto right now, the current issue of PENTHOUSE has

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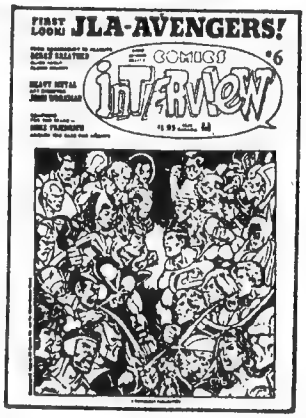

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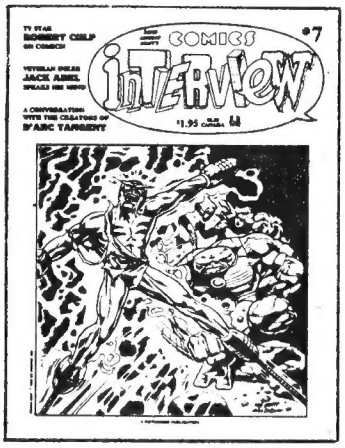

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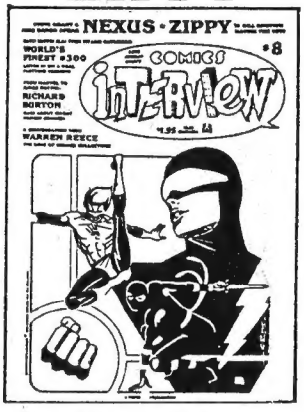

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been declared "obscene" and police have charged several store owners for selling it. Interestingly enough, this is despite the fact that a non-govenrmental advisory board of the magazine distributors had declared it as "safe." (The board apparently reviews all magazines coming into Canada and recommends changes.) And note that it was the people who *sell* the magazine, not the people who distribute it (as yet), that were charged. I have not heard of any charges being laid with respect to VOID INDIGO. (Perhaps this is because it was a Customs decision, whereas PENTHOUSE was a matter acted upon by the local police.)

Is VOID INDIGO obscene? Obviously, I'm not really in a position to judge and, besides, greater minds than mine have debated this general matter at length to little avail. However, somone *does* have the power to make such a ruling and it looks as if they just might be gearing up to excercise this power.

Why not interview someone at the Comics Code Authority to get *their* views on ratings, censorship, etc.... if we are going to be entering a new, more restrictive age, it would seem logical to get some background on past reactions to the same problem.

Turning to lighter matters... to **George Olshevsky**: Would you believe that you're the *first* person I've *ever* heard complain about Toronto's wonderful winters? No. (Well, it was worth a try.) Actually, *everyone* complains about the winter at one time or another — it's sort of a civic duty. But I'm sure it's not worse here than Winnipeg, or Calgary, or Minneapolis, or Acapulco — well maybe it's a *little* nicer in the winter in Acapulco.

"T.M. Maple"
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You know what they say, "T.M." — everyone talks about the weather but no one does anything about it. As for this whole Customs/censorship thing, don't be so quick to dismiss yourself with the out that "greater minds" have wrestled with the problem to no avail. What makes you think those minds were any "greater" than yours. And you are *in a position to judge! It's all prétty simple, when you get right down to it — as long as you're willing to abdicate your inalienable right to decide what you want to see, hear or read for yourself and let other people decide for you what you can and will be able to publish or purchase, there's going to be trouble. It's ludicrous to allow governments or anyone else the self-appointed power to censor... and that charges can be pressed in cases such as you cited and taken seriously is absolutely intolerable.*

— DAK

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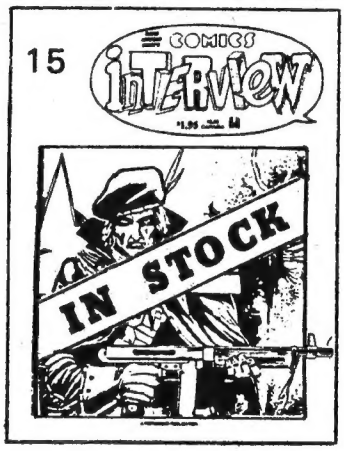

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NEXT ISSUE: We talk to LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES alumnus KEITH GIFFEN and X-Men artist DAVE COCKRUM — not to mention Deluxe Comics publisher DAVE SINGER — about the revival of the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS (and also find out more than a few other items of interest — from news of the NIGHTCRAWLER mini-series to the latest adventures of the AMBUSH BUG)! Plus: Part Two of the incredible ARN SABA interview — and lots, lots more — all in COMICS INTERVIEW 20.

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- Marvel Age (News!)
- Marvel Fanfare
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- Marvel Team-Up
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- Peter Parker
- Powerman & Iron Fist
- Rom
- Star Wars
- The Thing
- Thor
- U.S. 1
- What If ?
- X-Men
- Any Limited Series
- Any One-shot
- Any Marvel #1
- Any Marvel #1 (No reprints)
- All Marvel Annuals
- Any "Baxter" reprints
- Selected Marvel Annuals

EPIC COMICS
- Coyote
- Dreadstar
- Any Epic #1

MARVEL MAGAZINES
- Epic Illustrated
- Marvel Graphic Novel
- Marvel Super Special
- Savage Sword

DC COMICS
- Action
- All-Star Squadron
- Amethyst, Princess of Gem World
- Arak
- Arion
- Atari Force
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- Blue Devil
- Camelot 3000
- Captain Carrot
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- House of Mystery
- Jonah Hex
- Justice League
- Legion of Superheroes
- New Talent Showcase
- New Teen Titans
- Night Force
- Omega Men
- Ronin (Frank Miller)
- Saga of Swamp Thing
- Sgt. Rock
- Superboy
- Supergirl
- Superman
- Vigilante
- Warlord

DC COMICS
- Wonder Woman
- World's Finest
- Zero Man
- Adventure Digest
- Best of DC Digest
- Any DC #1
- Any DC #1 (No reprints)
- Any DC Maxi-series
- Any DC Mini-series
- All DC Annuals
- Selected DC Annuals
- Any DC Insert Comic
- Any DC One-shot
- Any DC Graphic Novel

FIRST COMICS
- American Flagg
- E-Man
- Mars
- Jon Sable Freelance
- Starslayer
- Warp
- Warp Special
- Any First Comics #1

PACIFIC COMICS
- Alien Worlds
- Berni Wrightson (Master of the Macabre)
- Captain Victory
- Edge of Chaos
- Elric of Melnibone
- Groo, the Wanderer
- Ms. Mystic
- Pacific Presents
- Quest and Other Tales
- Silver Star
- Somerset Holmes
- Twisted Tales
- World of Wood
- Any Pacific One-shot
- Any Pacific #1

RED CIRCLE
- Black Hood
- Blue Ribbon
- Comet
- Fly

RED CIRCLE
- Galaxia (Magazine)
- Hang Man
- Jaguar
- Mighty Crusaders
- Shield
- Thunder Bunny
- Any Red Circle #1
- Any Red Circle Mini-series

IMPORTS
- Dr. Who Monthly (Marvel U.K.)
- Cinema (Marvel U.K.)
- Dan Dare (Dragon's Dream)
- Starburst (Marvel U.K.)
- Warrior (Quality)

TITAN BOOKS, LTD.
- A.B.C. Warriors
- Charley's War
- Comic Tales (color)
- Garth
- Jeff Hawke
- Judge Dredd
- Nemesis

SPECIAL EFFECTS MAGAZINES
- American Cinematographer
- American Fantasy
- Cinefantastique
- Cinefex
- Cinemagic
- Fangoria
- Fantastic Films
- Starlog
- Starlog Guidebooks

ARCHIE COMICS
- If All

WHITMAN COMICS
- If all

ALTERNATIVE COMICS
- Az (Comico)
- Badger, The (Capital Publ.)

ALTERNATIVE COMICS
- Basically Strange
- Cerebus
- Comico Primer
- D'Arc Tangent
- Domino Chance
- Elfquest
- First Kingdom
- Vortex
- Gates of Eden (Fantaco)
- Grendel (Comico)
- Hall of Fame (John C. Publ.)
- Hembeck (Fantaco)
- Hugo
- Journey (A. Vanaheim)
- Justice Machine (Noble)
- Ken Pierce Reprint Series
- Love & Rockets
- Masterworks Series
- Neil the Horse (A. Vanaheim)
- Nemo (Classic Comics Library)
- Nexus (Capital Publ.)
- Pogo: The Okeefenokee Star
- Skrog (Comico)
- Slaughterman (Comico)
- Southern Knights (formerly, The Crusaders)
- Spirit (Krupp)
- Star Fighters
- Star Rider & The Peace Machine
- Steve Canyon (Krupp)
- Survivors (Spectrum)
- Swords of Cerebus
- Thunder Agents (John C. Publ.)
- Voyages (Nautilus Dreams)
- Whisper (Capital Publ.)

ECLIPSE COMICS
- Aztec Ace
- Destroyer Duck
- DNAgents
- Eclipse
- "Hall of Fame Series"

ECLIPSE COMICS
- John Law (W. Eisner)
- Ms. Tree
- Sabre
- Scorpio Rose
- Any Eclipse #1

AMERICOMICS
- Americomics
- Americomics Special
- Black Diamond
- Bolt & Star Force 6
- Fun Comics
- Sentinels of Justice
- Any Americomics #1

EAGLE COMICS
- Judge Dredd (color)

FAN MAGAZINES
- Amazing Heroes
- Bondage (James Bond)
- Comic Book Price Guide Update #2
- Comic Fandom's Forum
- Comic Informer
- Comic News
- Comic Reader
- Comics Collector
- Comics Feature
- Comics Interview
- Comics Journal
- Comics Scene
- Enterprise Incidents
- Fanfare
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- Fantastic Exploits
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- Fantasy Empire
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